

PUBLIC HEALTH

'Purple Heart' Drug

U.S. and British officials alike are concerned over the spreading use of stimulating drugs by youths, which play havoc with their nervous systems and also cause deaths.

► DRUG SPREES are becoming one of the menaces of British youth.

Teen-agers are taking up a particular combination of pep pill (dexamphetamine) and barbiturate (drinamyl) dyed purple that is playing havoc with their nervous systems.

The effect of the combination of stimulating and sedative drugs called the "purple heart" is to enable dancing teen-agers to "twist" or "shake" all night, Prof. A. D. Macdonald of the department of pharmacology, University of Manchester, England reported. (Purple heart has no relation to the famous American military decoration for being wounded.)

The tablets are often limited to weekend orgies, but the youngsters may take as many as 70 to 100 in a day.

The "mystique" factor of the purple color appears to have captured the imagination of the teen-agers, Prof. Macdonald believes, and he said it is a pity that pharmaceutical authorities ever allowed the coloring of tablets and capsules, a procedure that was strongly opposed by many experts.

The color psychology could also apply to "blue velvet," in the United States, which is a different drug combination—paregoric, containing opium, and the antihistamine, pyribenzamine, which has a characteristic bluish green color. Blue velvet, made by crushing a tablet of pyribenzamine and adding it to an ounce of paregoric which has been boiled down, is injected by addicts. SCIENCE SERVICE reported three deaths recently from this blue-colored combination.

Anxiety over the use of pep pills, especially the amphetamines and related substances, widely publicized in the United States, has now spread to Britain, emphasized by the purple heart fashion.

The actual size of the drug addiction problem in Britain is still small. Only 530 British addicts were recorded by the Home Office in 1962 as compared with 50,000 in the United States and 175,000 in India. Increasingly, workers in this field in Britain say that their Home Office figures are not realistic, but they point out that virtually all British addicts get their supplies from authorized sources.

Recently there have been reports that the hashish habit is developing on a grand scale at Oxford, with elaborate arrangements for supplies to be brought by agents from Morocco and by others who bring these Indian hemp drugs from Europe. Hashish is made from the dried flowering tops of pistillate plants of *Cannabis sativa*, a kind of hemp growing in Persia, East India, the United States and Central America. It is cultivated in Europe.

The "Brain Committee," set up in Britain in 1958 to control misuse of medicines, reported, however, that Cannabis was not

a drug of addiction but a "spree" drug. Some reputable British medical journals have expressed doubts as to whether marijuana "reefers" should be banned any more than whiskey.

University students have used pep pills during last-minute preparations for exams for a long time, Prof. Macdonald pointed out in his review, and such pills have long enjoyed a vogue among students who regularly read long into the night.

Another country troubled by drug misuse, or dependence, is Switzerland, where skilled watch-makers and others have taken up the use of phenacetin, ordinarily a mild pain killer. The workers who have begun taking it believe it helps them to work faster and with greater precision. If taken frequently, however, phenacetin is now believed to have harmful effects on the kidneys as well as on the cells of the blood.

The New Scientist, 22:340, 1964, carries the review by Prof. Macdonald on dependence on drugs.

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PSYCHOLOGY

Many See Alcoholics As Only Morally Weak

► A LARGE PART of the public still thinks of alcoholics as being morally weak rather than sick.

A survey of 1,213 representative Iowa adults, believed typical of other parts of the country, shows a combination of views on what is behind alcoholism. A total of 1,955 responses, an average of 1.6 per person, was given. Sixty-five percent leaned toward sickness, while 60% included weak will as a cause, many expressing a combination of the two.

Only 24% said they think alcoholics are sick only, but 34% believe weakness is the only reason for alcoholism. Forty-one percent defined alcoholics as both morally weak and sick.

When asked if they think alcoholics need some kind of help, and where they should go for help, 41% mentioned physicians as their first choice, regardless of whether sickness, weakness or a combination of these causes entered into the opinion.

Clergymen were suggested as a source of help by 27% of those interviewed, while 21% said help should be sought from Alcoholics Anonymous. Rural Protestants were most likely to reject the illness view and to look on any drinking as a moral issue.

The more the average Protestant went to church, the more likely he was to view alcoholism as a moral issue. Only 19% of those who went to church two or more times a month accepted the medical view, but 26% of those who went once a month

or less accepted it. Lutherans, however, endorsed the illness concept in the same proportion as Catholics.

Approximately 28% of Catholics and a like proportion of Lutherans said they think alcoholics are sick, as opposed to 22% of the remaining Protestants.

Educational programs emphasize replacement of the widely held moralistic view by the conception of the alcoholic as a person suffering from the disease of alcoholism, the researchers point out. This, in turn, would encourage the alcoholic and those about him to seek expert medical assistance.

Dr. Harold A. Mulford of the University of Iowa College of Medicine and Donald E. Miller, assistant research technician, California State Department of Corrections, Los Angeles, reported the study in the Quarterly Journal of Studies on Alcohol, 25:314, 1964.

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PSYCHOLOGY

Man's Mind Stores Words Like Goods in Warehouse

► THAT BOX we carry around on our shoulders and call a head contains a large storehouse of different items. Man sometimes gropes for the key to this storehouse and takes time to find the right word.

When a person is presented an object and asked to name it, he has to process a greater quantity of information to produce the word than he does to evoke the same word in a sentence, stated two British psychologists in London.

In an experiment that recorded the time people took to name certain objects, objects with rare names took longer to name than those with the more common names, reported Dr. R. C. Oldfield and A. Wingfield of the Institute of Experimental Psychology, Oxford University. This time lapse might be explained by the fact that rare words tend to be longer than common ones, and thus a person takes longer to organize the patterns of speech in order to say the word.

It might also be explained by the fact that more commonly required names are situated "higher up" in the mind than those less frequently needed, state the scientists in Nature 202:1031, 1964. This means that fewer steps or decisions were involved in reaching them and less time taken.

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GENERAL SCIENCE

Plastic Adds 3-D Touch In New Art Form

► A NEW ART FORM has been developed in which normal painting techniques are combined with collages of a new multi-lens plastic sheeting that, through reflection and absorption of light, creates curious three-dimensional effects.

Artist Salvador Dali believes that the sheeting, called Rowlux, provides a means to achieve the illusion of depth and light sought by other painters using dots of color. The new technique had been employed also by Walt Disney and other designers for exhibits at the New York World's Fair.

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