

CLINICAL NOTE

The general practitioner as a pusher

"G.P.'s are so worried about giving speed that they'll give as much Barbs as you like."

"Most of us have a copy of M.I.M.S. and dig out pills from there to ask for."

. . . Brighton drug-taker.

IN 1970 THE EAST SUSSEX Local Medical Committee recommended to all local general practitioners that a voluntary ban on prescribing amphetamines be imposed. All general practitioners in the area received a roneo to this effect.

In my clinical assistantship as anaesthetist, mainly for ECT, to the large mental hospital serving this area I came increasingly into contact in the wards I visited with patients who were in hospital for treatment of addiction to heroin and abuse of other drugs. I also met their nursing attendants and the consultant staff.

Personal contact with adolescents in the practice who had easily obtained and taken Schedule IV drugs produced a wish to stimulate a greater degree of control in prescribing these drugs, no doubt considerably reinforced by a rash of publicity in the press and broadcasting media about this time. At a local BMA executive committee meeting I raised this point and was given the brief of investigating the degree of the drug problem in the area. Following liaison with addicts, ex-addicts, casual drug-takers, psychiatric medical and nursing staff and police, the following document was drawn up:

Comment

At first sight alarming, the investigation proved in many ways reassuring. There was no vicious drug-peddling racket—rather a 'friendly society' where drugs were being swapped, passed around and bought in small quantities amongst the takers themselves, usually on a weekend basis. This may not seem reassuring, but suffice to say that a departmental enquiry into the complications of self-administration of intravenous barbiturate use was terminated after it was discovered there were fewer cases than predicted. Nevertheless, it was universally stated that general practitioners were as a rule a 'push-over' for drugs. Here one must remember that amphetamines are not necessarily the major objective, but barbiturates, tranquilizers and night sedatives are equally popular. In fact, both police and drug-takers said that a total ban on amphetamines would very likely force drug-takers to move on to more dangerous substances, such as barbiturates and LSD. Again, the method of using the drugs required a complete re-think of one's own personal criteria.

Whereas a student may consume large quantities of beer and still conform to society's expectations, a present-day student may drink very little but consume Mandrax to achieve the same end, mixed with a small amount of alcohol. This may be an anathema to one's own morals, but is now a fact of life (and probably cheaper).

It seems likely that we are putting too much emphasis on amphetamine bans at the present time, and should concentrate far more on barbiturates (9 per cent of all prescriptions), which are just as dangerous, and more so intravenously.

The really alarming fact is the ease with which LSD is now obtained and taken, and for £1 a trip is cheaper to an ill-informed adolescent than an evening out. Lately increasing numbers of cases of LSD psychosis are being admitted to the local psychiatric unit, and their prognosis is by no means settled as ultimate normality. With the arrival from the other side of the Atlantic of more powerful hallucogenic agents (STP), giving an 18-hours trip, the number of these psychoses may well increase to alarming proportions. It is these drugs that should now be vigorously pursued and their manufacturers severely punished.

Lastly, liaison must exist between medical bodies, such as local medical committees and

TABLE I
THE BRIGHTON DRUG-SCENE (INCLUDING MID-SUSSEX)
Drugs information chart

<i>Name</i>	<i>Known as</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Comment</i>	<i>Black market price</i>	<i>Type of use</i>
Heroin (Diamorphine HCl)	'H' 'horse', etc.	Clinic (imported)	No longer a problem in the area except in the summer months. Only two addicts remain on heroin at the Herbert Hone Clinic. A handful probably use it illegally, bought in London.	£1 per grain (Chinese)	i.v.
Physeptone Methadone	'Phy'	Clinic	25 registered ex-heroin addicts.	—	i.v., oral
Marihuana	Pot, weed, etc.	Imported	22 lbs per week smoked in Brighton.	£100 per lb.	smoked mainly
Lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD)	Acid	Manufactured locally?	Considerable problem at present time. Easily obtained and widely used. Some takers may trip up to six months after a single dose. Fortunately a pure preparation available at present.	10/- to £1 a trip	oral
Dexampheta- mine sulphate 5 and 10 mg. Durophet	Speed, (Dex-five, Dex-ten, 'Bombers')	G.P. prescription (a few from chemists thefts) and imported	Of little therapeutic use. Several local general practitioners named by contacts as a 'pushover' for 'speed' and 'barbs'. Addicts usually have four or five medical cards under assumed names and also send their 'chicks' into surgeries to request prescriptions. 'Weekend trippies' often buy these from them or use their parents' regular supply. Barbiturates in particular are taken by many young people, often intravenously or in conjunction with alcohol. <i>N.B.</i> —Barbiturates or barbiturate compounds comprise 9 per cent of all NHS prescriptions. They are probably teratogenic. Hospitals equally to blame because of 'routine' night sedation and hence large ward stocks.	Dex-fives 2/- each Dex-tens 2/6 each Bombers 2/- each	oral and i.v.
Tuinal Nembutal Sodium Amytal Seconal Soneryl (etc.)	'Barbs'			2/- to 3/- each	oral (with alcohol) i.v.

Ritalin	Ritalin	Prescription	Recent death from i.v. use.	2/- each	oral or i.v. (rarely)
Mandrax	'Drax' 'Mandys'	Prescription	Used with alcohol. Frequent weekend use. Maybe even taken as a dare whereby two competitors take one tablet after another until one 'crashes'.	2/- each	oral (i.v. rarely) with alcohol
Mogadon	Mogadon	Prescriptions	'Caught on in the last six weeks'. 'Safer if you're driving'.	1/- each	oral with alcohol (i.v. rarely)
Welldorm, etc.	—	Prescriptions	'Taken if nothing else going'.	1/- each	oral with alcohol
Librium Valium	'Trands'	Prescriptions	Up to 30 Librium may be taken over a weekend. Used to counteract a 'bad trip' with LSD.	1/- each	oral

Also—Largactil, antidepressants, codeine phosphate, Preludin, Marzine, 'Zoff', 'Lady Esquire', Dr Collis Brown's, Phenergan + alcohol, Mist. Kaolin and Morph. (Boots), etc., etc.

the police drugs squads; not to reveal professional confidences, as this will discourage consultation by the patient with side-effects of his drug-taking, but as an informal warning system to those doctors who are well known for their excessive prescribing habits.

Conclusion

An up-to-date chart of present drug-taking habits has been easily obtained with co-operation from both drug-takers and police. General practitioners are undoubtedly still the main source of supply. Although amphetamine prescribing is reducing, it must be remembered that this substance is now only one of many used—indeed barbiturates are more commonly taken in this area. LSD stands out as a frightening future threat to adolescent mental health, and LSD psychosis should be borne in mind when encountering acute bizarre psychoses in the 15–25 age group.

Footnote: No criticism of my colleagues in this area is either intended or implied. The situation is worse in many areas and may be expected to deteriorate in others.

ACCOMMODATION AT COLLEGE HEADQUARTERS

Temporary residential accommodation for members and associates and their families is provided at college headquarters. This building, overlooking Hyde Park on one side and Princes Gardens on the other, is central and easily accessible.

The charge, including breakfast, are as follows:

For single rooms	£2 10s. 0d. per night
For double rooms	£4 5s. 0d. per night
For a flatlet (bed-sitting room for two, bathroom and dressing room)	£6 per night or £36 per week

For a self-contained flat (double bedroom, sitting room, hall, kitchen and bathroom) £42 per week

Children under the age of 12 years cannot be admitted, and dogs are not allowed.

Members and associates may, subject to approval, hire the reception rooms for meetings and social functions. The charges for these are:

Long room (will seat 100)	25 guineas for each occasion
Damask room (will seat 50)	15 guineas for each occasion
Common room and terrace	15 guineas for each occasion

A service charge of 10 per cent is added to all accounts to cover gratuities to domestic staff.

For the convenience of members, four car ports, outside 14 Princes Gate, have been rented by the College and may be hired, at a cost of 10s. 6d. per 24 hours.

Enquiries should be addressed to the **Administrative Secretary, The Royal College of General Practitioners, 14 Princes Gate, London, S.W.7.** (Tel. 01-584 6262), Whenever possible bookings should be made well in advance.