A PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE USE OF CHLORPROMAZINE HYDROCHLORIDE IN A CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION

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The increasing use of chlorpromazine hydrochloride in the New York State hospital system to control excited behavior led the author to consider its use in a reformatory type of institution for female offenders. Five years experience at Westfield State Farm, Bedford Hills, N. Y., has brought, to the author, an awareness of the high percentage of mental illness in this population. Frequently, there are violent, excited episodes which require the use of restraint and occasionally transfer to Matteawan State Hospital. These episodes are usually of short duration and occur in individuals in whom schizoid or paranoid features are prominent.

Before institutionalization, the girls' relief from increasing tension was usually obtained through acting-out behavior in the community. Because of the penalties for such behavior at the institution, attempts are made by the inmates to exercise more than ordinary self-control. Thus, anxiety and tension build up to alarming proportions, and minor episodes tend to release violent reactions of an assaultive or self-destructive nature. Awareness of the ability of chlorpromazine to reduce anxiety and tension without clouding the sensorium led to the conclusion that this drug would be especially useful in this setting.*

Twenty-one individuals are reported upon in this communication. They are the first to be treated at the institution; the program, however, is continuing. All individuals treated initially were chosen on the basis of severe acute or chronic feelings of anxiety and tension. As experience broadened, persons with paranoid ideation, schizoid individuals and those in whom emotional instability was a prominent feature were included. Later still, chlorpromazine was tried as an aid to psychotherapy where it was felt that severe anxiety was blocking treatment.

The diagnostic categories included pseudoneurotic schizophrenias, pseudopsychopathic schizophrenias, schizoid personalities, and inadequate personalities, as well as acute schizophrenias. Nine of those treated had been addicted to narcotics.

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The initial dose varied widely, ranging from 30 mg. to 150 mg. Occasionally in the presence of an acute excitement state the parenteral route was used, followed by oral administration. Over the period of treatment, doses ranged up to as high as 250 mg. a day, with a usual dose of 75 to 150 mg.

It was found that 16 of the 21 individuals treated did well on this dosage schedule. Three cases went on to full-blown psychoses, requiring transfer to Matteawan State Hospital. Later, it was felt that a higher dosage of the drug might have brought more favorable results with these three patients, since none had received more than 200 mg. a day. Two other individuals were thought not to have responded favorably to the medication. One girl, Delores M., showed no improvement while on medication for 97 days but marked improvement approximately six weeks after medication had been discontinued. One can only speculate as to whether there is a relationship. The second girl who was thought not improved refused medication after 19 days because of no apparent benefit.

Of the 16 girls who improved as a result of treatment, three had received chlorpromazine on a short-term basis, as an aid to overcoming acute anxiety attacks. When the attacks subsided, all requested discontinuation of the medication. Two left the institution shortly thereafter. The other girl has shown no recurrence of severe anxiety since stopping treatment. The remaining 13 girls received chlorpromazine over considerable periods, from 54 to 225 days, in conjunction with psychotherapy. All showed definite improvement, with lessening tension, anxiety, agitation and mental confusion. Emotional instability was less marked, ability to handle stressful situations improved. In some cases ideas of reference decreased and greater sociability resulted. Judgment improved and, concomitantly, adjustment to the institution.

Seventeen of these girls have now left the institution. Unfortunately follow-up studies are inadequate, although some girls have maintained personal contact with the writer and appear, thus far, to be maintaining an adequate adjustment. Five of the 17 are on small maintenance doses. Three girls still at the institution have not received chlorpromazine for some time and have maintained their improvement. One girl continues on a small maintenance dose.