

Does Brain Chemistry Defect Lead to Depression, Later Alcoholism?

"I drink because I'm sad and I'm sad because I drink", goes the alcoholic's lament. But a Winnipeg pharmacologist says he agrees — at least with the first part. He has suggested that some drinkers may in fact have a defect in the limbic system of the brain, leading to depression, which the drinker tries to 'correct' through alcohol.

At the annual meeting of the Canadian Foundation on Alcohol and Drug Dependencies held in Toronto recently, Dr. C. Pinsky, a University of Manitoba pharmacologist, noted that while the limbic system of the brain modifies mood, in some people the system may be defective, motivating the person to seek the help of mood altering drugs. "A clue as to what the deficit might be may be given by the drug which the individual is using", said Dr. Pinsky.

Using the example of alcoholism, he pointed out that alcohol "seems to lubricate the wheels of sociability", usually leading to a happy, carefree mood — the opposite of the psychomotor retardation in depressive psychosis. The mentally depressed patient may therefore be using inebriation to treat his depression, said Dr. Pinsky. He noted that a study currently being conducted at a Winnipeg hospital has found some degree of depressive psychosis in 385 of 800 alcoholic patients, while an unpublished study pegged the province wide rate at only one in 500. Dr. Pinsky urged that if the alcoholic has a history of depression, antidepressant therapy should be instituted.

In the depressed patient, he continued, the chemical imbalance causing the depression is probably impairment of the limbic neurotransmitters dopamine and noradrenaline. According to recent evidence, antidepressant therapy in treating alcoholics is now under intense investigation at the Grace Hospital in Winnipeg, he commented.

Dr. Pinsky acknowledged that prevention is still the best treatment of drug abuse, and he suggested that presenting the *science* of drug effect to students of all ages will diminish the magicality of drug taking. He commented that his own university department sponsors community resource lecturers in 'drug hygiene' starting at the grade three level — with tremendous student interest. The same holds true, he said, for a rigorous but popu-

lar university course offered at the University of Manitoba called 'drugs in human biology': "No one who has taken this course ever retains the notion that drug taking has any more magical quality, inherent value or potential pleasure to offer than does watching television or speeding on the highway".

Dr. Pinsky estimated that these courses could easily be slipped into existing school curricula beginning at very early levels and costs would be minimal. But the cost of treating one citizen with bronchitis or emphysema induced by cigaret smoking could be in the vicinity of \$10,000 over a lifetime.

British Columbia Kidney Patients Receive Gift of \$35,000 'Mobile Dialysis Home'

Dialysis on wheels? The British Columbia Chapter of the Kidney Foundation of Canada recently received as a gift from the Royal Canadian Legion's Pacific Command a Mobile Dialysis Home. The \$35,000 vehicle, which includes a portable dialysis unit, will allow British Columbians suffering from kidney disease to enjoy travel vacations with their families.

According to a spokesman for the Royal Canadian Legion's Pacific Command, this year marked the 50th anniversary of the RCL, which prompted the idea of a commemorative gift to B.C. citizens. He noted that the mobile dialysis home sleeps six, and has all the amenities of any motorized home, including shower,

toilet, fridge, stove and auxiliary generator in case of emergency, plus citizen's band radio. The donation of the unit was accompanied by a \$15,000 grant to the Division of Kidney Disease, Department of Medicine at the University of British Columbia and to the Vancouver General Hospital where the money will be used in research.

Patients wishing to use the mobile home will take a short course at Vancouver General Hospital to familiarize themselves with the portable unit. Special driving courses for such a vehicle have also been offered by the Professional Driver Centre, Division of the B.C. Safety Council located in Delta, B.C.



Peter Guimaraens (left) chairman of the British Columbia Kidney Foundation's Mobile Dialysis Committee and also a kidney patient, receives instruction on use of the dialysis unit from Pam Lawton, Vancouver General Hospital home dialysis instructor. The unit is located at the rear of the mobile home.