

## THE NUMBER AND KIND OF DRUG ADDICTS.\*

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In recent years social workers, reformers and newspaper writers generally have vied with each other in the presentation of startling data regarding the number and kind of drug addicts in this country. In doing so they have established the general impression that those engaged in the various branches of medicine and particularly those engaged in the practice of pharmacy, have been delinquent in that they have failed to safeguard the sale and distribution of habit-forming drugs with the care that properly should have been exercised.

Among the statements frequently met with in current papers and periodicals the following are representative:

"More than two percent of the people of this country are addicted to the use of opium and cocaine, and this number is being augmented at the rate of 100,000 a year."

"Fully 90 percent of the opium we import is used for illegitimate purposes."

"For every ounce of cocaine employed legitimately there are 200 ounces consumed illegitimately."

"Physicians are responsible for at least 95 percent of the habitual users of opium, its compounds and alkaloidal salts."

"More dope fiends have been created by the refilling of prescriptions than in any other way."

"At least 10 percent of the 45,000 drug stores in the country exist largely upon the illegitimate sale of habit-forming drugs."

"Many of the proprietary remedies sold to the laity contain a sufficient amount of dope to develop and to maintain a drug habit."

"The use of heroin as a 'kicker' in patent medicines is comparatively common."

"The Harrison law, excellent so far as it goes, is effectively negated by the exceptions included in Section 6. The most exacting dope fiend could not ask for a larger hole in the law. If he can get an unlimited amount of his favorite drug in a nostrum form anything else that the Harrison or any other law may or may not provide is a matter of indifference to him."

As has been pointed out before (P. H. Rep., 1914, v. 29, p. 3180) some, at least of these statements are not based on reliable data, while others, having the elements of truth, are misleading either because of their incompleteness or because of the partial misstatement of fact. While it is unfortunately true that the number of drug addicts in the United States is disgracefully large it does not, and of necessity cannot even approximate the maximum that has been stated.

Practically all of the opium and coca used in this country is imported through legitimate channels, and because of the comparatively high import tax considerable care is exercised to insure the reporting and recording of all of the products

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\* Read at meeting of Pennsylvania Pharmaceutical Association, 1915.

at our disposal so that we have fairly reliable data on which to base an estimate of the amount of either drug that is available for all purposes.

Converting the recorded quantities of the several drugs imported into average doses, as presented in the Pharmacopœia of the United States, we find that for some years the total amount of these drugs imported has been fairly uniform and will aggregate an average of approximately 2,500,000,000 doses of opium, its derivatives and alkaloids, and 325,000,000 doses of coca leaves and cocaine. These figures serve to definitely fix the amount of available material and quite regardless of the proportion of the several drugs that may be used legitimately or illegitimately the sum total of illegitimate use cannot well exceed the sum total of the available material.

A rather interesting source of information regarding the actual number and kind of drug addicts is available through the enforcement of the Tennessee anti-narcotic law of 1913. Lucius P. Brown, the State Food and Drugs Commissioner of Tennessee, in a recent report (*Am. J. Public Health*, 1915, v. 5. p. 323-333), says that after twelve months of operation there were registered in the State of Tennessee under the provisions of the anti-narcotic law 2,370 persons of all ages and years. These included 784 or 33.1 percent males and 1,586 or 66.9 percent females.

The average consumption per day of the morphine addicts was 8.5 grains or approximately 1000 doses each month or 12,000 doses a year. The State of Tennessee contains slightly more than 2 percent of the total population of the United States and on the supposition that the same ratio of addicts and the amount of material consumed will hold good throughout the country we would have a total of something more than 118,000 drug habitués consuming approximately 1,416,000,000 average doses per year.

Granting the somewhat improbable assertion that 90 percent of the opium imported is used illegitimately at the rate that it is said to be consumed in the State of Tennessee we could have, as a maximum, not more than 187,000 users of opium, its derivatives and alkaloids, in all parts of the United States.

In regard to the use of cocaine a recent authority asserts that one ounce of cocaine is enough to keep 50 fiends thoroughly well doped for a week, or in other words, that one ounce of cocaine is enough to keep 1 fiend thoroughly well doped for a year.

Granting that all of the available 150,000 ounces of cocaine were used illegitimately there could be at this rate a total of 150,000 cocaine fiends in the United States.

That this estimate is somewhat high would appear from the report by C. G. Steinmetz, Jr., (*J. Am. M. Assoc.*, 1915, v. 64. p. 1271), who made a study of 15 cases of cocaine habit acquired by men employed where the drug was manufactured. The daily quantity taken varied from 20 to 60 grains; the method of taking was solely by snuffing it. Even on the basis of the lower quantity the consumption per annum would be in the neighborhood of 15 ounces and thus reduce the possible number of cocaine fiends very materially.

Pharmacists who have been unfortunate enough to meet with patients addicted

to the use of cocaine will appreciate that the figures given by Steinmetz are much more nearly in accord with actual practices than are the figures previously quoted. Taking all the available facts into consideration it would appear that the estimate made by the Committee of the American Pharmaceutical Association some years ago, that the drug addicts in this country do not exceed 200,000 in number is approximately correct even at the present time.

That the previously made estimates of the number of drug addicts in this country were altogether erroneous is further evidenced by the published reports on hospital admissions since the Federal anti-narcotic law came into effect. It had been predicted that the result of the enforcement of this law would be a besieging of hospitals by drug addicts and a crime wave of national scope accompanied by a trail of suicide and death. While the effect of the enforcement of the Federal anti-narcotic law has been clearly evidenced by hospital reports the results have been by no means so far reaching or so startling as had been expected.

The most shocking of the several available reports is that of Wm. D. McNally, Coroner's Chemist, Cook County, Chicago, (*J. Am. M. Assoc.*, 1915, v. 64, p. 1264), who states that during the month of March, seven deaths occurred in Cook county that were indirectly due to the sudden cessation of the use of morphine. Four died from taking an overdose of morphine. One of the four died from taking an overdose of "Dr. Weatherby's Remedy," a morphine cure containing over seventeen grains of morphine sulphate per ounce. During the month of December, 1914, not a single death occurred in Cook county from morphine. During January and February the record shows one death for each month.

Clifford B. Farr, (*J. Am. M. Assoc.*, 1915, v. 64, p. 1270), reports that since the enactment of the Harrison law the number of admissions to the Philadelphia General Hospital of cases of morphine and heroin addiction has markedly increased. In the first 68 days of 1915, 86 patients addicted to heroin were admitted, while in 1911 there was not one.

Other cities have reported similar results but so far as known the amount of suffering has not in any way measured up to the results that were predicted by newspaper writers and others when the Federal anti-narcotic law was under consideration.

Now just a word in regard to the origin of drug addiction. C. E. Terry, City Health Inspector of Jacksonville, Florida, in the report of a study of local conditions (*Am. J. Public Health*, 1914, v. 4, p. 32), states that of 213 cases of drug habituation studied by him personally their origins in the order of their frequency were as follows:

Through physicians' prescriptions or treatment personally administered 54.6 percent.

Through the advice of acquaintances (for the most part themselves users), 21.6 percent.

Through dissipation and evil companions 21.2 percent.

Through chronic and incurable disease 2.4 percent.

The conclusions reached by Terry agree very well with those enunciated by Brown that from 90 to 95 percent of the persons habitually using narcotics do so entirely unnecessarily.

It should be remembered that the figures quoted above refer solely to the number and kind of addicts, generally recognized as such, who use narcotic drugs in comparatively large amounts. There is still another, and a very pathetic side to the drug addict problem that has as yet received altogether too little attention. This problem involves the ways and means of generating the habit and also includes a consideration of the unfortunate who for one reason or another feel compelled to continue the use of comparatively small amounts of a narcotic drug.

Practically all authorities are agreed that the continued use of cocaine is a vice rather than a disease and the Federal as well as State anti-narcotic laws appear to recognize this fact and provide special safeguards to prevent the indiscriminate sale or distribution of even small amounts of cocaine or of preparations containing it.

With opium, morphine and related products on the other hand no such precautions have been taken despite the fact that addiction to the use of these drugs is generally recognized as a condition over which the individual patient has little or no control.

Up to the present time altogether too little authoritative information is available regarding the origin and subsequent progress of the condition commonly described as morphinism, because physicians usually see only the fully developed cases or the at times spectacular end results.

The morphine or opium addict, as a rule, is secretive and generally seeks relief in ways that are destined to make him an easy prey for the charlatan or advertising quack who promises a positive cure with secrecy.

Lambert, Towne, and others, who have made a study of drug addiction, agree with the conditions of Terry quoted above that a very large proportion of the persons addicted to the use of opium and its alkaloids have acquired their habit from the thoughtless renewal of prescriptions containing narcotics or by self-medication with preparations containing comparatively small quantities of an opiate.

In this connection it may be said that it is not generally realized that the taking of even small doses of opium or morphine, at regular intervals for a continued length of time will be more likely to develop the opium habit than the occasional indulgence in larger quantities.

It has been asserted (Petty, G. E., J. Am. M. Assoc., 1913, v. 61, p. 566), that the average person will develop an addiction to opium or one of its alkaloids after thirty days of daily use and that after the continued use of such a drug for three months or more, it is practically impossible to discontinue its use without medical aid.

With these several possibilities fairly well established it would appear to be unfortunate to endorse or even to countenance exception clauses in anti-narcotic laws, such as Section 6 of the Federal law, which permit of the indiscriminate sale or distribution of preparations that not alone may but positively will establish a habit that once established cannot readily be overcome.

In the Federal anti-narcotic law we have the possibility of an accurate survey of existing conditions in connection with the use and abuse of certain narcotic drugs. The findings if they can be made a matter of record will place the blame for the illicit use of proscribed drugs where it rightfully belongs and will suggest ways and means for correcting existing abuses.

To secure efficient restrictions on the sale and distribution of narcotics, and to demonstrate that they are not primarily to blame for the generation and continuation of the addiction referred to, pharmacists individually should not alone be willing to comply with existing requirements under the law but should see to it that others engaged in the same line of business comply fully with the spirit as well as the letter of existing laws and regulations.

There can be no gainsaying the fact that the amounts of opium and of coca consumed annually in this country are out of all proportions to the actual need for medicinal purposes but to locate the existing leaks the followers of all branches of medicine, and particularly the men engaged in the practice of pharmacy, must make consistent and persistent efforts to purge themselves of even the suspicion of being directly or indirectly to blame for existing abuses.

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### THE STANDARDIZING OF PHARMACY LEGISLATION.\*

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Judging from the multitude of restrictive and inquisitorial measures offered in the legislatures each year, the dealer in drugs and medicines should be regarded as a dangerous member of society, who needs to be closely looked after by those members of the community who find their chief enjoyment in regulating the business of other people.

In February of the present year, the writer began receiving abstracts of the bills affecting pharmacy which were pending before the various state legislatures. In April these abstracts made a pile nearly eight inches in height, each sheet representing from one to four or five bills. The original bills from which these abstracts were taken, all of them affecting pharmacy in some respect, if brought together in one place, would probably have made a pile of four or five feet in height, and this was for approximately one-half of the legislative season.

Some of these measures no doubt represented really needed and useful legislation, as they seem to have done in Illinois, but it is safe to say that the majority of them represented the meddlesome attempts of half-baked reformers who possessed only the vaguest of ideas on the subjects they sought to regulate, and their enactment would have been followed by grave inconvenience and damage to legitimate business without corresponding benefit to any one, unless to those for whom the bills sought to provide positions and salaries.

Some of these bills proposed to regulate the drug business in general; others confined themselves to particular features. Many of them related to the same subject, but no two of them were exactly alike in the regulations which they proposed to establish.

Those engaged in almost every other species of commerce and industry could tell the same tale of foolish, unjust and hurtful attempts to regulate the conduct of their affairs by legislative enactment, and the prayer of the whole business

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\*Read at the meeting of the Illinois Pharmaceutical Association.