

By Warren Hall

The World's Foremost Institution for Drug Addicts Turns Its Attention to a Soul-Killer More Menacing Than Morphine or Cocaine

THE interior of the big brick building looked more like an hotel than an institution, but the girl shivered involuntarily. She answered the questions almost breathlessly, dreading the days ahead but racing to meet them, to get it over. Background? She told them. Home life? It was good. Drugs? To be sure. What kind—morphine?

"Yes," she said. "Oh, yes . . . yes." For a moment she sobbed.

At noon the next day a nurse called Dr. Kenneth Chapman, clinical director of the U. S. Public Health Service Hospital at Lexington, Ky.

"That girl we admitted yesterday," she said. "She's in convulsions. You'd better come."

One look told the answer. The doctor slipped a hypodermic into a vein and pushed the plunger. When the girl was able to talk, he said gently:

"You didn't tell us everything, did you?"

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Illustrated by CONNIE VAN

and 100 women now being treated are voluntary patients. One of the most famous of this category was Barney Ross, the former lightweight and welterweight boxing champion, who became addicted while being treated for malaria on Guadalcanal and made a successful comeback in life after only four months at Narco, as the institution is affectionately dubbed by its guests.

If the voluntaries have money they are expected to pay \$5 a day, but since illicit drugs cost so much and usually bankrupt as well as incapacitate their users, most of the patients are unable to pay anything.

Thirteen thousand have been admitted at Lexington since 1935. Attempts to keep in touch with them after they left have been only partially successful, but the records indicate that approximately 20 per cent have been freed of the drug habit for at least five years. About 40 per cent return to the institution at least once and a small number have been back six or more times.

Drug addicts frequently resort to barbiturates as a substitute. If they are "on the pills" when they enter Narco and fail to reveal the fact, they often go into convulsions the next day. Intravenous barbiturate injections quickly revive them and then they are given gradually reduced doses daily for a week or ten days.

Ten days is also the period usually required to take patients off narcotics without too much shock. On arrival they are switched to methadone, a synthetic substitute for morphine, and they receive a little less each day.

Withdrawal of the drug, however, is a comparatively small part of the treatment. The real problem is to convince a reformed addict that he can lead a normal existence. At Narco, this is accomplished by keeping him busy as well as by whatever psycho-therapy the small staff of psychiatrists are able to apply.

There is plenty to do. Except for a few key jobs, all the work in the vast institution is performed by the inmates. They keep the rooms, offices and corridors immaculate. They cook and serve the food. They are employed in the research department, the engine room, the homes of the doctors.

On the model farm which occupies part of the 1080 acres and which supplies meat, milk, butter and vegetables for the establishment, they adapt themselves quickly in the dairy, the slaughter house, the canning factory, the stables, the garage, the truck garden.

In the garment shop they turn out uniforms and clothing and in the workshop they make remarkably fine furniture. They do printing, bookbinding, radio repairs. They take and develop still and moving pictures. They publish a weekly and bi-monthly. They paint pictures, read thousands of books, take study courses.

Rehabilitated, they re-enter the world. After that, the doctors keep their fingers crossed.

Seeking the truth about BARBITURATES

"You were taking more than morphine."

She nodded. "Yes. Barbiturates, too."

At the Lexington hospital, which is the largest in the world for the treatment and study of narcotic addiction, barbiturates are considered equally as dangerous as morphine or any of the other derivatives of opium which the institution is designed to combat.

"From the standpoint of public health, barbiturates are even more dangerous because of their widespread use," says Dr. Victor Vogel, head of the hospital.

Because more people all over the world seem to be relying on sleeping pills (U. S. production figures on barbiturates jumped from 351,000 pounds worth \$2,263,000 in 1941 to 900,100 pounds worth \$3,560,300 in 1947, and manufacturers say much of it is being exported), and because considerable still remains unknown about their effect on the human system, the hospital is conducting the most comprehensive research project ever undertaken concerning them.

Volunteer patients are being dosed in varying degrees and under different circumstances to verify an already well-supported theory that indiscriminate use of barbiturates frequently results in addiction and that barbiturate addicts

are much more likely to suffer permanent mental and physical disabilities than narcotic addicts.

Dr. Harris Isbell, research director, and a staff of assistants will check the mental and nerve reactions, the blood pressure, temperature, respiration and other signposts of each patient before and after individual tests and before and after the entire experiment, which will take approximately six months.

Every day the hospital authorities receive written and telephoned requests for the admission of barbiturate addicts, but except in the few instances in which they are accepted for study, the requests must be denied.

Before 1935, there was no federal institution to handle narcotic addicts, either. Then the Public Health Service Hospital was erected at Lexington and three years later another was built at Fort Worth, Tex.

Both operate on the same principle. Narcotic addicts convicted of crimes are sent there for definite terms. Others are put on probation if they agree to stay at least six months. Anyone in the country can be admitted, however, if he or she applies to the Surgeon General in Washington and has a doctor's certificate indicating narcotic addiction.

At Lexington, about half of the 800 men