

Quackery or Therapy?

patients who were being treated for hypertension. I was told that mental patients were treated similarly. In a fashionable Paris clinic, soft music is played in the wards; but at the Leningrad clinic of Professor Chernorutsky, not the slightest sound is permitted, not even the click of a door closing or a nurse's footfall.

Professor Chernorutsky uses the treatment for ulcer cases. He induces sleep by giving regular anesthetics. By isolating the brain, the long sleep prevents the body tissues from reacting to the ulcer and frees the ulcer to "sleep itself out." In Germany the sleep cure has been used with apparent success as a slimming treatment.

PERHAPS the best place to study the sleep cure is at two private Swiss clinics, Prangins and La Métairie, both on Lake Geneva near Lausanne. Neither is recommended for those with limited funds—the bill for a month's snooze can run up to \$1,000.

At these clinics the newly arrived patient first is given a thorough physical checkup. Then he receives a morphine derivative to calm him down. Next comes an injection to send him off into a light sleep, and, from then on, drugs are administered daily to keep him that way.

The patient is awakened for meals at the usual times. If he is very sleepy, he is spoon-fed, although usually he can sit up and feed himself. At regular intervals he is bathed and led to the bathroom. Then he slides back into sleep.

Reactions vary greatly. Some patients cannot remember what they ate at their last meal. Others have total recall of what happened to them during their periods of semi-wakefulness.

The patient's return to normal after two or three weeks of sleeping is gradual. Even after a single week's sleep, he needs four or five days of "convalescence" before he emerges from the general mood of wooziness. But then suddenly: *Bam!* He is wide awake and is eager for work and action.

All sleep systems are consistent on this: sleep must be kept light, nothing more than a doze. Experiments in deep sleep, which were carried out in Germany as early as 1925, were instructive and resulted in some remarkable cures, but the heavy sleep carried considerable danger. Patients had to be tube-fed and given enemas. Too profoundly asleep to cough and thus clear the lungs, they became subject to bronchopneumonia. The frequently astonishing recoveries did not compensate for a 10-per-cent mortality rate.

One of the chief problems of the sleep cure—and a reason for the widespread medical distrust of the treatment—is the fact that sleep itself is still a mystery to medicine and science. Little is known about it. Doctors really do not know what sleep does for the body or even whether sleep is necessary at all.

But whatever the merits of the cure, a profusion of new means of inducing sleep continues to pop up in medical journals from London to Moscow.

The French claim to have discovered a sleep hormone which necessitates a drop-by-drop transfusion. The Russians, probably the most advanced people in the world on this particular subject, have gone into mass production with a delicate instrument called an Elektrotron which induces "electric sleep." Electrodes are placed on the eyelids, behind the ears, and at the base of the brain. The patient feels a slight, agreeable pulsation behind the eyes and a prickly feeling about the eyelids; then he goes to sleep.

LIVES have been saved by the sleep treatment. In 1961 an English girl, Jennifer Davey, was dying from tetanus. Unable to breathe because of the paralysis of her lungs, she was put into an artificial lung and sent into a two-week sleep. This unknotted the muscles, and she made a complete recovery.

The *British Medical Journal* reported the case of a mentally sick boy in a New-castle, Australia, hospital in September, 1959. An appeal went out to Russia for the Elektrotron. The message was relayed to an Australian writer in Moscow who bought the apparatus for \$200 and entrusted it to an airline stewardess. Because of its delicacy, it had to be carried on the laps of crew members for the entire flight to Australia. The application was said to be successful and the boy's disturbance to have diminished.

At a fashionable clinic in Paris I asked a doctor what types of people needed the sleep cure most. Without hesitation, he replied, "Jazz musicians. More than any other artists, they are genuinely tied up in knots inside."

I asked about movie stars and was given a reply of appropriate Gallic realism. "Film stars are a different matter," he said. "They think the sleep cure sounds chic; they enjoy talking about it at cocktail parties. But between you and me, few movie stars really need it. In their profession they rarely think enough for their brains to get tired."

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