

Chicago 15, Ill.

412 E 47th Street

January 11, 1956

Dr. G. Howard Gowen
State Office Building
400 South Spring Street
Springfield, Illinois

Dear Dr. Gowen:

I received your letter regarding my opinion on the need for mental hospitals with special reference to institutions for narcotic addicts. I felt that I should make a brief survey and up to the minute evaluation of the problem in Chicago, at this time. I therefore read some of the most recent statistics and after some delay, due to the holidays, I was able to interview some of the law enforcement officials and assistant states attorneys connected with the narcotics court.

I have found that in Chicago during the last couple of years the incidence of new drug users is going down slightly in the overall age groups with a very decided reduction among juveniles. This is seen best in the fact that while the number of arrests have increased at least 75% in 1955 have been "repeat" cases or previous offenders. There are two important facts which stand out in my opinion. 1-There is still a tremendous backlog of people who have become addicted during the epidemic beginning five to eight years ago, the majority of whom have not been "cured" with present methods. 2-Our psychiatric methods in Chicago and elsewhere indicate that drug addiction is for the most part only a symptom of a deeper and more fundamental psychiatric and perhaps psychosomatic defect. The true nature of this disease has not been satisfactorily elucidated with reference to its nature and effective cure. Many students of the problem regard drug addiction in the young as simply another overt manifestation of juvenile delinquency, comparable to automobile thefts, sex delinquencies, etc. These overall manifestations among juveniles and young adults have been on the increase throughout the country.

These facts, plus the admittedly slow response to the method we have employed in the Medical Counseling Clinics of the State Department of Health, certainly are, in my opinion, arguments for an organized and concerted national medical attack on the problem. A survey to evaluate incidence will be a most difficult problem and addict registration seems not to be the answer. The long history of drug addiction in America seems to follow an endemic and epidemic curve. While economic and social pressures are certainly different today than they were during

previous "epidemics", no one can predict whether there will be an automatic decline in incidence in the near future. If the illicit traffic or heroin is eventually controlled by increasingly more strenuous law enforcement measures and cooperation from producer countries we are still faced with an ever increasing legitimate market of synthetic drugs with varying degrees of addictability and which will modify personality traits.

I therefore would go along with the establishment of more mental hospitals which would be flexible enough to handle all types of mental illnesses which would also have sufficient security facilities so that mentally sick individuals who are guilty of misdemeanors, felonies or crimes could be made to pay their debt to society and at the same time receive medical care which would tend to prevent recurrent anti-social behavior. Secondly, I would say that the Medical Counseling Clinics of the Illinois Department of Public Health, developed and operating in Chicago during the last five years, have successfully demonstrated the beneficial effects of long time follow-up care of narcotic drug users.

In summary I would highly recommend the cooperative establishment of mental hospitals with law enforcement facilities in a cooperative relationship between Federal, state and municipal, medical and legal agencies, to begin in the bigger urban centers. With special reference to narcotic addiction, long time follow-up clinics closely associated or connected with such hospitals have proven their worth and justification. Thirdly, adequate psychiatric, sociologic, physiologic and pharmacologic research should go hand in hand with all phases of these projects.

Sincerely yours,

Leonidas H. Berry, M.D.
Coordinator, Medical Counseling Clinics

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