

Actually, it is among many of these patients that Indocin is beginning to score its most impressive victories. These are individuals who have been "put on" almost every available drug—without lasting benefit.

Indocin, however, provides such dramatic relief for some of these patients—and so quickly—that many of them are moved to sit down and write about their experiences with the drug to its producer, Merck Sharp & Dohme of West Point, Pennsylvania.

The following are some samples of these letters to the pharmaceutical firm:

From Kansas City, Missouri: "I have had rheumatoid arthritis for 12 years. And I have taken many different medications. But for the first time—with Indocin—I'm free of pain. I'm no longer ornery. My wife says she's glad to have the old me back again. . . ."

From Minneapolis: "Because of bursitis I had to give up golf two years ago. But with your wonderful medicine I'm in good enough shape now to play golf once again. . . ."

From Detroit: "For five years the pain of my arthritis of the hip was unbearable. Now, with this drug of yours, I feel like a new person. Your Indocin is the best present anyone could have given me. . . ."

And from San Diego: "This is the first 'love letter' that I have ever written to a corporation. . . . After a very short period of taking Indocin, I can walk again without a cane. . . . I pray that you will realize fully the rewards that your splendid discovery so richly merits. . . ."

The "splendid discovery" actually took place several years ago at Merck Sharp & Dohme. Research workers there came upon a synthetic compound that had some surprising effects in animals. Not only could it reduce pain and inflammation but, given together with older pain killers, Indocin was found to reduce the need for these latter drugs.

This particular capability of Indocin is especially important. For in study after study, it has been found that if Indocin is given along with the corticosteroids (a commonly used "family" of anti-inflammation drugs), the need for these steroids gradually diminishes. This, in turn, can be invaluable, because very often when steroids are given for prolonged periods the side effects are worse than the disease itself.

Steroids are known to produce changes in body fluid balance and can cause weight gain, stomach upset, changes in contour of the face, and they are suspected of having adverse effects on vision.

The "steroid reduction" value of Indocin has been commented upon in scientific papers by a number of medical researchers. But one group from the University of Buffalo School of Medicine summed up the entire subject after studying more than 200 patients who were taking Indocin. The Buffalo group declared:

"At present 65.7 per cent of the patients have been improved for periods of six to 14 months. There has been a gradual decrease in the inflammatory indices, improvement in joint mobility and function. . . ."

One of the most interesting facets of indomethacin administration has been the ability to gradually reduce the amount of steroid therapy in patients who had been using these hormones for periods of three to eight years. . . .

"This effect is very gradual and sometimes difficult to ascertain but does occur in the majority of patients under prior steroid therapy. . . ."

The same effect has been noted—along with Indocin's other values—at other leading medical centers located at the University of Colorado, the University of Southern California, the University of Washington, and elsewhere throughout the nation.

Despite Indocin's dramatic effects in some cases and its increasing acceptance by even some of the most skeptical medical practitioners, a few facts should be borne in mind—facts that are indispensable to understanding the role of any drug—new or old.

All prescription drugs, Indocin included, have side effects—that is, they produce negative reactions, reactions that make the patient either mildly annoyed and anxious or profoundly distressed physically or mentally.

All prescription drugs, Indocin included, work for some patients and not for others. No drug is a universal cure-all. In arthritis and related joint diseases, the actual causes are not known—and therefore there are at present no available drug "cures." At best, the drug provides relief from the symptoms.

However, Indocin is a "new" drug—that is, it was approved for prescription use in 1965. Therefore, it has been subjected to extremely rigorous tests—tests that were not required of certain of the older anti-inflammatory drugs.