

and is an important issue to consider. Unfortunately, this issue is more easily raised than answered if conclusions are to be documented and factual rather than opinionated and judgmental. For the past 3 years Dr. Mitchell Balter, Chief of the Special Studies Section of the Psychopharmacology Research Branch, has been formulating precise questions about the extent and character of psychotropic drug use and has been collecting the extensive data that are required to provide accurate and comprehensive answers to these questions at the national level. The work is still in progress but some answers are currently available and will be presented today.

The critical questions are fairly simple: To whom are psychotropic drugs being prescribed? For what purposes are psychotropic drugs being prescribed? In what manner are they being prescribed, and, finally, in what manner are they being used by the patients?

Several sources of data and types of information are needed to answer these questions satisfactorily. In our working model the physician is viewed as a gatekeeper who issues a prescription to a patient who then has a number of options. He may go on and fill that prescription at a drugstore or elsewhere, or he may not. He may not use all the medication provided in the original prescription or he may not obtain all the refills permitted. Given the range of possibilities, it becomes necessary to study the prescribing behavior of the physician and to gather accurate information on drugstore outflow. It is also crucial to obtain information directly from patients, former patients, and others in the general population who are using psychotropic drugs, whatever the source. This requires a broadly based survey approach in that the individual can move about from place to place, can change physicians, can borrow drugs, or buy them licitly or illicitly without consulting a physician. Without obtaining information on the pattern of use directly from the individual, the true significance and character of the drug use cannot be assessed. Through a series of studies supported by contracts and grants and analyses conducted within the Institute, a large body of information on physicians' prescribing, drugstore outflow, and patients' and others' use of drugs is being steadily developed. It is from these carefully coordinated ongoing activities that the data to be presented today has been derived.

EXTENT OF USE OF PSYCHOTROPIC AGENTS

Initially, let us consider a representative period and characterize prescription drug use during a single year. In 1967 it is estimated that a total of 1.1 billion prescriptions for drugs of all types were filled in drugstores throughout the United States at a retail cost of \$3.9 billion. Psychotropic drugs, as previously classified, made up about 17 percent of this total or 178 million prescriptions at a consumer cost of \$692 million. Forty percent of this total was accounted for by new prescriptions; 60 percent by refills. These figures for psychotropic drugs do not include those preparations which are mixtures of a psychotropic drug plus a nonpsychotropic drug such as an antispasmodic agent, or a coronary vasodilating agent. If these combinations were added, the percentage accounted for by psychotropic drugs might rise to almost 25 percent of all prescriptions. Parentheti-