

than 1 month. At the other extreme, 21 percent of the drug users reported regular daily use of a prescription drug for a period in excess of 5 months; 90 percent of those reporting use of over-the-counter psychotropic agents had used them on only a few occasions or a number of occasions of short duration.

During the coming year a much more comprehensive national survey than any previously carried will be undertaken by the Social Research Group of George Washington University with NIMH grant support to pinpoint in detail the extent and character of psychotropic drug use in the United States.

So much for the extent of psychotropic drug use. Now, let us try to answer some of the more detailed critical questions posed earlier.

TO WHOM ARE PSYCHOTROPIC DRUGS PRESCRIBED?

This question has as many answers as the ways in which it is possible to characterize people. Today we will only talk about two of the more important characteristics related to psychotropic drug usage; namely, age and sex.

The large bulk of psychotropic drug prescribing occurs in the over-20 age group, principally for ages 40-59. Further, it is clear that stimulant drugs are used much more extensively during young adulthood while the sedatives and hypnotics are most frequently used in advanced ages. Use of minor tranquilizers and antidepressants is greatest in the age range of 40-59. These data coincide with clinical knowledge that somatic disorders with stress components such as cardiovascular and gastrointestinal disorders, which are frequently treated with sedative drugs, occur in later life as do general problems of insomnia. The use of stimulants at an earlier age is strongly related to their use as appetite suppressants and anti-obesity agents.

Shifting our attention now to the sex distribution, females receive a much higher proportion of psychotropic drugs than do males. On an overall basis they account for approximately 67 percent of all psychotropic drug usage, whereas on nonpsychotropic drugs they account for 60 percent. Exactly why this differential exists is not clear and it certainly deserves closer study. It is interesting to note that stimulants and antidepressants are overwhelmingly "female drugs" and females account for 82 and 74 percent of the use respectively. Cross-tabulation of the age and sex variables indicates that with increasing age the male-female imbalance in receipt of psychotropic drugs tends to diminish.

BY WHOM ARE PSYCHOTROPIC DRUGS PRESCRIBED?

Although psychiatrists and neurologists as a specialty group prescribe psychotropic agents at a greater rate than any other physician specialty, over 70 percent of all prescriptions for psychotropic agents are written by general practitioners, internists, and surgeons. Psy-