

SECTION III - Chapter 1. The Story of CIBA's Serpasil

DEVELOPMENT OF THE TRANQUILIZERS

Serpasil and the drugs included for study with it are considered here as tranquilizers for mental and emotional disturbances, since this seems to have become their main common usage. Most of them were originally developed as hypotensive agents to lower blood pressure, but the tranquilizing side effect has assumed greater importance.

The drugs in this group, except Thorazine, were developed from *Rauwolfia serpentina*, a snake-like root from India long used in that country as a cure-all. In 1931 two Indian chemists isolated five crystalline substances from the dry powdered snake root; and in 1949 success was reported in the use of some of these substances in reducing high blood pressure.

Experiments with these snake root substances attracted the interest of a number of pharmaceutical manufacturers at about the same time.

Raudixin, the powdered whole root, was brought to the market first, in May 1953, by Squibb.

Rauwiloid, which Riker introduced very

shortly thereafter, is an alkaloidal extract obtained from the snake root.

Serpasil was the outcome of attempts to isolate the active ingredients from *Rauwolfia serpentina* which had been started at Ciba in 1947. A research team there succeeded in 1952 in isolating reserpine, the most active snake root component. It was marketed in powdered form in November 1953 as Serpasil.

Thorazine, a derivative of phenothiazine, was originally introduced by Smith, Kline & French for control of nausea, vomiting and hiccups, but is now used extensively as a tranquilizer.

Rau-sed, which is the alkaloid reserpine, was the second snake root drug introduced by Squibb.

Reserpoid, also alkaloid reserpine, is an Upjohn product.

Serpasil-Apresoline is a combination which has more effective hypotensive action than Serpasil, its fellow Ciba product.