

MATERIALS AND METHODS

All newly admitted patients who had been drinking heavily for a period of at least two weeks immediately preceding hospitalization were considered for the study, as well as patients originally admitted for relatively minor medical or surgical conditions who developed alcohol withdrawal symptoms during the early part of hospitalization.

Patients selected for the study had to show at least four of the following eight symptoms of withdrawal:

1. Gastro-intestinal distress: anorexia, nausea or vomiting
2. Sweatiness and/or flushing
3. Insomnia
4. Tremulousness
5. Irritability
6. Apprehension
7. Depression
8. Clouded sensorium or confusion

Patients were excluded from the study for any of the following reasons:

1. Over 55 years of age
2. Frank schizophrenia, or obvious chronic brain syndrome
3. Complications requiring primarily medical or surgical attention.
4. Delirium tremens at the time of hospitalization
5. Known epilepsy or diabetes.

Successive patients who fulfilled the selection criteria were assigned by random code to one of the five treatment groups. On the first day all patients received every six hours, either:

1. 50 mg. of chlordiazepoxide intramuscularly
2. 100 mg. of chlorpromazine orally
3. 100 mg. of hydroxyzine intramuscularly
4. 100 mg. of thiamine intramuscularly, or
5. Placebo

On the second through tenth days, a flexible dosage schedule was employed within decreasing limits. During the last 4 days of the 10-day treatment period half of each treatment group was changed to placebo. All treatment was oral after the first day. During the first day patients on intramuscular medication also received placebo capsules; patients on oral medication also received intramuscular placebo injections.

During the ten days of the study, no other psycho-active drugs, conventional sedatives, or hormone or vitamin preparations could be prescribed. Fluids were prescribed orally or intravenously as needed in accordance with good medical care. Other supportive treatment was also provided as seemed indicated.

Chlordiazepoxide—LIBRIUM

Chlorpromazine—THORAZINE

Hydroxyzine—ATARAX, VISTARIL