

HipPocrates

Eugene Schoenfeld M.D.

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Dr. Eugene Schoenfeld speaking at Community Arts Auditorium, May 28, 1969 at a benefit for Open City.

Photo: Alan Gotkin.

QUESTION: In a recent column you referred to a medical underground weekly called the *A.M.A. News*. I would like to place a subscription for my doctor to this paper. He is a real good doc and all but seems to have blinders on. Could you give me the address?

ANSWER: Almost every physician in the United States receives the *A.M.A. News*, the official newspaper of the American Medical Association. I referred to it facetiously as an underground weekly because it presents views often at odds with its own members and the rest of society. For example, the A.M.A. opposed health plans such as Blue Cross and Blue Shield, bitterly fought and lobbied against Medicare for the aged, and only in the past year has acknowledged a fact long known to both patients and practicing physicians, that a shortage of physicians exists in the United States.

QUESTION: Does LSD really harm chromosomes?

Answer: Distortion of "reality" is an effect attributed to the psychedelic drug LSD. But more dangerous distortions may be caused by those who oppose new ideas of fear, ignorance and prejudice. The LSD controversy may well be remembered in history as ranking with the persecution of those who thought the earth was round or that the universe did not really move about the earth.

How did the LSD-chromosome story begin? One day a physician visiting the San Francisco area for a medical meeting was walking through the Haight-Ashbury district. He gawked at the hippies in their beads, long hair and flowers, shook his head and said,

"My God, look at those kids. Something must be wrong with their chromosomes." Then (contrary to the rules of scientific procedure) he set out to prove that LSD was harmful.

Since that time several reports have purported to prove that LSD was harmful to chromosomes and each was widely reported in newspapers and magazines. But scientific investigations and conclusions require time. Only now is a balanced picture of the chromosome question emerging.

In the October 27, 1967 *Science*, a team of researchers from the Lawrence Radiation Laboratory of the University of California at Berkeley reported their study of chromosomes of LSD users in the Haight-Ashbury. They found no difference between the chromosomes of LSD users and non-users. The same results were found in a study by Dr. Nicolas Petrakis, a hematologist of the University of California School of Medicine at San Francisco. These two studies finding no chromosomal damage in LSD users were reported in the San Francisco Chronicle but received little or no notice elsewhere.

Child psychiatrists Bender and Sankar of the Creedmoor State Hospital in New York were disturbed by reports of LSD-induced chromosomal damage because they had treated schizophrenic children with pure known LSD (with favorable results) in quantities of 100 to 150 micrograms every day from 5.5 to 35 months. The children's chromosomes were examined 20 to 48 months after LSD therapy discontinued and were found to be unchanged. Bender and Sankar's findings were reported in the February 16, 1968 *Science*. Their conclusions were "...the negative findings are significant because these children received up to 150 micrograms daily of pure chemical over a known period of time, even as long as 2 and 3 years, in contrast with studies by Irwin and Egozcue, whose subjects received unknown materials of unknown strength."

A series of one does not make a scientific study but it is of interest to note that Dr. Timothy Leary, who has taken LSD well over 400 times, recently had his chromosomes examined by the Harvard University Medical School. They were found to be within normal limits.

"LSD, Chromosomes and Sensationalism", a paper prepared for *Psychedelic Review* No. 10 by Joel Fort, M. D. and Ralph Metzner, Ph.D. reviews the LSD-chromosome controversy. The authors conclude that at present the question of LSD-induced chromosomal damage is, at best, undecided.

Another part of their conclusions states "Women in the first trimester of pregnancy (1st 3 months) would be wise to avoid the use of all drugs, particularly those which affect the brain and mind, including caffeine, alcohol and nicotine." Dr. Schoenfeld welcomes your questions. Write to him c/o Fifth Estate.

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