letters to the editor

steroid hormones in schizophrenia

To the Editor:

A body disturbance with some interesting similarities to schizophrenia has developed in patients treated with high levels of cortisol over a long period. Cortisone was once thought to be the miracle drug that could alleviate the symptoms of allergies and other disorders. It confers upon the body an ability to withstand stress and exposure such as that seen in the schizophrenic. As in schizophrenia, however, cortisone treatment had its disadvantages. Not only were patients treated with the hormone weakened in their defense against tuberculosis and slowed in their healing response (as in schizophrenia), but they developed mental disorders including full-blown psychosis.

Obviously schizophrenics do not have too much adrenal cortex activity, because other symptoms associated with an oversupply of cortisone are not present. This does not rule out an improper synthesis, utilization, or breakdown of the steroid hormones.

A disturbance in the steroid-controlled processes would be aggravated in periods of increased steroid synthesis such as puberty. This is found to be the case with schizophrenia. Testosterone (also a steroid) therapy is already being tried by Carl Pfeiffer, who noticed that schizophrenic mothers improved when they bore male children and worsened when the children were female. The majority of autistic children are known to be male. To me, this seems to indicate that steroid hormones at least have an effect on the severity of the disease.

More research on how the steroid hormones affect the body as they do might yield fruitful insights into schizophrenia.

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fashions in research?

To the Editor:

I have read with a great deal of hope E. Fuller Torrey's guest editorial. It confirms notions and hypotheses I have had for many years; there do, indeed, seem to be "fashions" in research in this important field.

I would like to see a small grants research program funded for schizophrenia research—to be conducted, one hopes, by overburdened clinical persons who are working with actual schizophrenic patients in therapy. I would also like to see a column or page in the Bulletin opened up to "divergent opinions," as Dr. Torrey suggests. I should look forward to contributing to and to reading such a page.

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Editorial note: The At Issue section is intended to be a forum for readers' opinions—whether divergent or otherwise. Contributions from Dr. Nelson and other readers are always welcome. Remarks should be sent to AT ISSUE at the address listed on p. 13 of this issue.

erratum: embarrassment reaction type

To the Editor:

On page 362 of my recent article, "The Psychology and Psychopathology of Attention" (Schizophrenia Bulletin, Vol. 3, No. 3, 1977), I inadvertently advanced a century in reviewing the role "attention" has played in experimental psychology. A reference to "the close of the 20th century" was clearly intended to mean the 19th century, as the remainder of the paragraph suggests.

I regret an error that makes clear to readers of the Bulletin my disorientation in time, if not place or person.

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