

## VAN DIE REDAKSIE : EDITORIAL

## PRAKTIESE ASPEKTE VAN DIE PROBLEEM VAN SELFMOORD

Gedurende die afgelope twee of drie dekades het die algemene lewensstyl van die gemiddelde persoon onherkenbaar verander. Die stadige en rustige verloop van sake wat 'n kenmerk was van die lewenspatroon van vorige geslagte, het vir altyd verdwyn. Ons probleme het 'n groter omvang en terselfdertyd 'n groter intensiteit aangeneem, met die gevolg dat ons belewing van die spannings en drukke van andere, waar hulle hulle ook al op die aardbol begeef, meer daadwerklik en meer onmiddellik 'n neerslag op ons eie lewens het.

Een van die opvallende gevolge van hierdie veranderde lewenspatroon is dat dit 'n besondere invloed het op die manier waarop individue teenoor die wêreld en teenoor hulself reageer. Die vae soort historiese ontwykingsreaksies, wat vroeër so algemeen aangetref is, word nou selde of nooit in hul ou vorms gesien. In plaas van hierdie soort reaksies het spanning en angs (met bedekte en verskanste bedruktheid) nou op die voorgrond getree — in so 'n mate dat ons sou kon sê dat spanningsreaksies inderdaad die neurotiese idioom van ons tyd geword het.

Die gevolg van hierdie toestand van sake is dat ontvlugtingstendense dwarsoor die wêreld 'n neiging tot toename toon: Dranksugtigheid word by die dag 'n groter probleem. Die gebruik en misbruik van verdowende en verslawende middels neem in 'n ontstellende mate toe. En selfmoord word een van die vernaamste oorsake van sterfte.

Hoe ernstig hierdie probleem is, sal dadelik blyk as ons sê dat selfmoord vandag die negende grootste oorsaak van sterfte in Amerika is, en dat dit ook 'n groot probleem vorm in die meeste ander lande van die wêreld. Op 'n praktiese vlak is die hantering van pasiënte wat pogings tot selfmoord aanwend een van die ernstigste probleme waarmee die algemene praktisyn en die personeel van hospitale gereeld te doen kry. Dit sal dus gepas wees om hier weer kortliks sommige van die implikasies van die probleem van selfmoord van naderby te beskou.

Om mee te begin, is dit belangrik om aan te toon dat sekere tipes van pasiënte veral blootgestel is aan moontlike selfmoordreaksies. Selfmoord of 'n poging daartoe is byvoorbeeld altyd 'n potensiële gevaar in alle gevalle van bedrukte pasiënte. Dit sluit pasiënte in met enige vorm van bedruktheid, soos byvoorbeeld manies-depressiewe toestande; ander endogene bedruktheidstoestande; organiese, reaktiewe en psigoneurotiese bedruktheid; involusie-melancholie, en versluisde angstoestande. Groot tragedie vind daagliks plaas omdat die heftigheid en hardnekkigheid van bedruktheidsreaksies onderskat word.

'n Ander belangrike groep toestand wat baie algemeen voorkom en wat eintlik 'n aparte entiteit vorm, is die vae, onomskeure bedruktheidstoestande van middeljarige persone. Hierdie toestande is besonder ernstig en verraderlik omdat hulle dikwels misgekyk word en ook omdat hulle dikwels ernstige, onderliggende toestande van wanaanpas-

sing en versteuring versluier. Vroeë tekens van hierdie soort bedruktheid van middeljariges is die verlies van selfvertroue, onsekerheid, slapeloosheid, spanning, die neiging om uit te stel en af te stel, en 'n algemene afname in produktiwiteit. Die wakker praktisyn behoort altyd daarop bedag te wees om hierdie soort toestande nie gering te skat of mis te kyk nie, veral omdat hulle by uitstek behandelbaar is.

Pasiënte wat ly aan sommige vorms van ernstige geestesversteuring is ook potensiële selfmoordgevalle. Voorbeelde hiervan is skisofreniese en paranoïde pasiënte. Neurotiese pasiënte pleeg selde selfmoord tensy onderliggende toestande van angs en spanning oorweldigend word.

Dit is besonder interessant om daarop te let dat selfmoord en pogings tot selfmoord dikwels 'aansteeklik' is en 'n soort 'sosiale mode' word. Dit is byvoorbeeld bekend in sommige van ons dorpe en distrikte dat 'n selfmoord aanleiding gee tot 'n hele reeks selfmoorde. Ook wat betref die metode van selfmoord is daar 'n opvallende element van 'aansteeklikheid' en nabootsing.

Die vraag of persone wat selfmoord pleeg noodwendig abnormaal is, en of selfmoord nie ook by 'normale' persone voorkom nie, is hoofsaaklik van teoretiese en akademiese belang; nogtans het dit belangrike praktiese implikasies. Dit is nie so seer die vraag of persone wat selfmoord pleeg normaal of abnormaal is wat belangrik is nie, maar die feit dat daar by sulke persone altyd 'n ernstige mate van persoonlike en maatskaplike disintegrasie teenwoordig is. In terme van die beginsels van die voorbehoedende medisyne is dit dus belangrik om maatskaplike patologie, hoe en waar dit ook al aangetref word, as ontwrigtende faktor te erken en te behandel.

Dit wil voorkom of daar in die gemeenskap soos dit op die huidige oomblik saamgestel is, 'n groot behoefte bestaan aan meer geleenthede vir mense om raadgewing te ontvang en om hulle te kan ontboesem. Daar is byvoorbeeld baie gevalle waar die geneesheer nie nodig is nie, omdat die betrokke persoon nie 'siek' is nie, en waar die psigiater ook nie nodig is nie omdat daar geen ernstige geestesversteuring is nie, maar waar 'n simpatieke raadgever en vertroueling tog absoluut noodsaaklik is. Sulke adviserende dienste word orals oor die land onderneem deur verenigings en liggame soos die Vereniging vir Geestesgesondheid, die Nasionale Raad vir Alkoholisme, huweliks-buro's, burgerlike adviesburo's, kinderleiding-klinieke, die Kerke, ens. Hierdie soort voorkomende dienste behoort uitgebrei en aangemoedig te word sodat toestande van ontreding vroeg behandel kan word voordat hulle ontwikkel tot ernstige vorms van liggaamlike of geestesiekte of voordat hulle uitloop op die ontwikkeling van ernstige disintegrasie en wanaanpassing.

### THE SYNTHETIC INSECTICIDES

Although the natural product pyrethrum has been in domestic use since before the present century, the modern synthetic insecticides only came into general use after World War II. They have since taken on great and growing importance in preventive medicine and public health. Epidemics of typhus, relapsing fever and plague have been put down by their use and malaria, filariasis, sandfly fever and other endemic diseases have been controlled. In South Africa excellent results have been obtained in the suppression of malaria by residual spraying of huts in native territories; and the WHO is promoting similar campaigns in many parts of the world. It is in tropical countries that insecticides have been found of most value in suppressing disease. In cooler climates their use in public health has been more confined to the abating of nuisance caused by such domestic pests as bedbugs, fleas, head lice, houseflies and cockroaches. In the economic field, also, insecticides are widely applied in combating diseases of plants and animals.

In the February issue of *The Practitioner* there is an article by Dr. J. R. Busvine on the present status of insecticides.<sup>1</sup> He pays special attention to the resistance which has developed in more and more strains of insects (and other arthropods) as a result of the use of insecticides. This resistance is not a tolerance acquired by individual insects after sublethal exposure to poison, but is an innate character occurring in certain individual insects, brought into prominence by selected mortality caused by the wide use of insecticides. Exactly how widespread the inherently resistant individuals are is not known; it is safest to assume that resistant strains may always appear. This development is more or less proportional to the extensiveness of application of the insecticide. Resistant strains are commonest where house-spraying campaigns have been pursued for years over wide areas. There has, for instance, been a sharp increase in DDT-resistant strains of anophelines in recent years, which may be due to the widespread residual-spraying campaigns.

The resistance is specific for particular insecticides, though cross-immunity occurs within chemically related groups. Thus, mosquitoes resistant to DDT are usually susceptible to 'dieldrin' (see below) and *vice versa*. But strains are appearing in increasing numbers with resistance to two or more groups of insecticides. This is a serious threat to the only known remedy for resistance, viz. a change of insecticide.

Busvine also reports investigations in the toxicity of insecticides to vertebrates by experiments on rats.

The following are the chief classes of insecticides in use:

1. *The DDT group.* DDT (dichloro-diphenyl-trichloro-

ethane) is the most widely used residual insecticide. It is more toxic to man than pyrethrum, but there is little risk in its use. Many compounds with analogous molecular structure have insecticidal properties, but none have the all-round efficiency of DDT as residual insecticides. A few are produced commercially for special purposes. Resistance to DDT is well known, e.g. in houseflies and anophelines.

2. *BHC and related chlorinated compounds.* Gamma BHC (benzene hexachloride) is widely used, though not on the scale of DDT because it has not the same residual persistence. It has a similar low vertebrate toxicity to that of DDT. Of the related family of chlorinated Diels-Alder condensation products, dieldrin is about as residually persistent as DDT and is more intensely insecticidal, though liable to provoke resistance. It is much used for spraying walls, etc., to destroy mosquitoes and flies, though, being rather more toxic to vertebrates than DDT, it is not so suitable for use against ectoparasites (lice, fleas, etc.) in man or animals.

3. *Cholinesterase inhibitors,* including organo-phosphorus compounds and carbamates. The organo-phosphorus insecticides have an extensive application in agriculture, and are also used against vectors of human disease. 'Parathion', the first to be used, is dangerously poisonous to man, and has caused many fatal accidents; but certain others, e.g. 'malathion', are as safe to use as DDT. None of them has the residual persistence of DDT or dieldrin. 'Dichloros' (DDVP), a volatile member of the group, of moderate toxicity to vertebrates, is lethal to flies and mosquitoes in the low concentration of 0.1 mg. per cubic metre. It is being used in the USA as a fumigant for aircraft disinfection, and its use is suggested for malaria control in the tropics. The potentialities of the carbamates have not yet been fully explored; they have less residual persistence than the chlorinated insecticides.

4. *Pyrethroids.* Pyrethrum, which consists of powdered pyrethrum flowers, is very rapid in action and for practical purposes is non-toxic to man; but it has hardly any residual action, it is rather expensive, and its active ingredients are difficult to extract in a pure form. Synthetic compounds (pyrethroids) analogous to its active principle are now being produced, but they are only slightly cheaper and their insecticidal power is less than that of natural pyrethrum. Both the natural and synthetic products can be made more effective, and their use more economical, by adding certain non-toxic synergists, such as piperonyl butoxide.

1. Busvine, J. R. (1962): *Practitioner*, 188, 267.

#### 44TH SOUTH AFRICAN MEDICAL CONGRESS (M.A.S.A.)

##### SCIENTIFIC EXHIBITION

Doctors or university departments interested in exhibiting in this section of the South African Medical Congress in Johannesburg on 21-27 July 1963, are requested to notify the Secretary of the Congress, P.O. Box 10102, Johannesburg, not later than 31 December 1962.

#### 44STE SUID-AFRIKAANSE MEDIËSE KONGRES (M.V.S.A.)

##### WETENSKAPLIKE UITSTALLING

Dokters en universiteitsdepartemente wat belang stel in hierdie afdeling van die Suid-Afrikaanse Mediese Kongres in Johannesburg op 21-27 Julie 1963, word versoek om die Sekretaris van die Kongres, Posbus 10102, Johannesburg, in kennis te stel nie later as 31 Desember 1962.