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Complaints about drug experiments on mentally retarded children

Complaints have been received that experimentation with heavy doses of a potent hallucinogenic drug, with the properties of LSD, have been carried out on mentally retarded children in Kimberley Hospital in Levin.

The complaints were received by the Citizens Commission on Human Rights. The drug, Psylocybin, possesses hallucinogenic properties similar to those of the drug Lysergide which is popularly referred to as LSD.

The commission has also received information that the stringent consent procedures have not been adhered to. Letters have been sent to the Minister of Health, the Director of Mental Health and the Medical Council of New Zealand, to have the practice of using these heavy doses on mentally retarded children investigated.

Medically, a high dose of the drug ranges from 6 milligrammes to 15 milligrammes. A low dose consists of 4 milligrammes. The mentally retarded children in Kimberley Hospital have been injected with 6 milligrammes, according to the documented evidence.

The commission also accuses at least one psychiatrist in Kimberley Hospital of experimenting with the drug Stealazine by doubling the dose on a mentally handicapped girl, knowingly risking Parkinsons Disease in her. Documented evidence shows that the girl developed this disease as a result of the doubling of the drug dosage. She stood aimless, rigidly and raising her hands like a little dolly, and then flapping them while uttering high pitched shrieks. She was unable to sit down. Possible braindamage has been caused by the large doses of Stellazine.

The complaints were made by staff who were disgusted at seeing their patients being subjected to these experimentations.

Mr Harry de Jong, research officer for the commission said: "It is once again evident that safeguards are needed for children in New Zealand institutions. This time it is the mentally handicapped children. Which category of children in the care of institutions is it going to be the next time? Staff are concerned that they have to stand by and see patients, who are mentally handicapped, go through an enforced "acid trip".

We know that one mentally retarded child's trip lasted 24 hours. Under the influence of the hallucinogenic drug this child was subjected to half hour sequences of: trancelike expressions, mirthful wandering, and tense openmouthed catatonic preoccupation. Also experiencing extreme difficulty in breathing while holding on tightly to the attendant. We are repeating the call made last year by the opposition spokesman for health, Mr J. L. Hunt, by demanding for an overall investigation of the psychiatric service in New Zealand with special emphasis on child psychiatric maltreatment.

This includes an overhaul of the Mental Health Act 1969, which has medieval committal procedures. Its definition for "mentally disordered" for the purpose of committal needs to be redefined to a clearent statment, and a clear section added for informed consent procedures for the more ambiguous treatments, such as shock treatment, psychosurgery and the more potent psycho-tropic drugs.

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