

# Doctors say use of mood drugs on retarded could be detrimental

By SYDNEY FREEDBERG

The potent mood-control chemicals contemplated for use at Willowbrook Developmental Center may not be indicated for the proposed purposes and could be detrimental to mentally retarded children, several prominent doctors said yesterday.

The physicians agreed the drugs in question — including the psychoactive substances lithium carbonate and haloperidol — are not administered routinely for hyperactive, abusive or aggressive behavior.

Such a use, they believe, would be experimental even if the substances turned out to be beneficial to some patients.

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of manic-depression and schizophrenia.

They are "clearly not the drugs of choice in treating abusive or aggressive behavior," Cohen said, especially in children who are mentally retarded.

Dr. Cohen acknowledged familiarity

The physicians' prevailing view on Willowbrook's controversial drug proposal was that the chemicals indeed should be tested on patients with behavior problems — but such experimentation should not take place at an institution for the retarded.

Dr. Henry M. Wisniewski, director of the Institute for Basic Research in Willowbrook, argued: "I am not aware these drugs are proven effective for making a child calmer. This would have to be a very careful research design before I went along with it."

Dr. Wisniewski, a neuropathologist and an expert in mental retardation, pointed out such a drug trial might be "medically justifiable — any other

with the work of Dr. Magda Campbell, also a psychiatry professor at NYU and the designer of Willowbrook's drug-therapy proposal.

Dr. Campbell, he said, experiments at Bellevue on "toddlers" — some 6 years old, he said — to see the effects lithium salt treatment has on their condition.

Cohen added that Dr. Campbell is "known for experimentation in this field," but is generally not regarded as an expert outside it. Dr. Campbell was said to be on vacation and could not be reached for comment.

She declined last week to answer questions concerning the specifics of her proposal.

Willowbrook administrators, arguing the drugs are licensed for use, call the substances under review "innovative treatment." They deny parents' charges they intend to do chemically intrusive research on the institutionalized retarded, which is specifically forbidden at Willowbrook by a 1975 court order.

Dr. Levester Cannon, Willowbrook's director, said yesterday that Lithium and Haldol are issued frequently by private physicians, so there is no reason they should be disallowed at Willowbrook.

Behavior-control drugs will aid certain residents, Dr. Cannon said, and "anything that can keep a resident from being self-abusive should be tried."

Told of doctors' reaction to the plan, Dr. Philip Ziring, the deputy director of clinical services at Willowbrook, answered: "This is an uncommon situa-

place than Willowbrook."

"There is so much concern about supervision there. This project has to be so carefully monitored, each individual evaluated precisely, before you start prescribing those drugs," he said.

There is no indication Willowbrook can conduct an experiment with "enough safety factors," according to Wisniewski.

A psychiatrist at Bellevue Medical Center, Dr. Carl I. Cohen, who is also a professor at the New York University School of Medicine, noted that the drugs marketed as Lithium and Haldol have only proved effective in the treatment

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tion (at Willowbrook because some of the residents) are uncommon."

Private psychiatrists and other physicians, Dr. Ziring contended, are unaware of the problems of his "special group."

Dr. Darla Bjork, a child psychiatrist at South Beach Psychiatric Center, said the drugs Lithium and Haldol are "not standardly used" for the types of problems Willowbrook intends them.

As an experiment "it might be quite valid," she added, "but I have not heard of using Lithium under 12 (years old)."

One professor at Downstate Medical College, who has done extensive work in the field of psychoactive drugs' effects on mentally retarded children, endorsed the proposal.

He said: "If you see some of those children biting themselves as they do, then you'd want to try (the drugs) also."

"It might really help the inmates," the doctor, who asked to remain anonymous, added.

Willowbrook's drug plan presumably requires the approval of several advisory boards, which have said they are opposed to it.

The mood-control drugs in question would apparently supplement the use of the chemical marketed as Thorazine, given frequently at Willowbrook now to those deemed to have behavioral problems.

All psychoactive substances, according to nine doctors interviewed, often have severe side effects. Among them are the inhibition of learning ability and the promotion of depression.