

- (3) It has been observed that drugs such as clomipramine and zimelidine with more specific blockaging effects on serotonin receptors have more effective analgesic properties than mianserin and maprotiline which are potent inhibitors of noradrenaline uptake. Furthermore, a serotonin precursor such as l-tryptophan (King, 1980) sometimes promotes analgesia in chronic pain patients and appears to potentiate endogenous opioids (Lee *et al*, 1979).

The precise mode of action of some antidepressants with analgesic properties is unclear but I agree with Dr Hanks that extrapolation from experiments on animals subjected to acute pain is unlikely to be relevant to human patients suffering from severe, intractable, chronic pain. Possibly antidepressants have peripheral as well as central activities as suggested by Massey and Riley (1980), who considered that they could affect neuronal and axonal transmission: hence their special benefit to patients with diabetic and other neuropathies.

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POLYGLOTTISM AND DEPRESSION

DEAR SIR,

Dr Hughes in his review of bilingualism (*Journal*, July 1981, **138**, 25–8) refers to the relation between

primary mood disorders and language preference. I report that polyglottism occurs in affective disorders significantly more often in patients with bipolar than unipolar depression (Kun *et al*, 1978). Polyglottism is defined here as the knowledge of *two* or more foreign languages acquired by active learning rather than by birth in a foreign-speaking family or settling in a foreign area. We studied 245 consecutive acute female admissions who met the Feighner (1972) criteria for bipolar and unipolar depression. We established the presence or absence of polyglottism after recovery.

Of 126 bipolar depressives 36 (29 per cent), and of 119 unipolar depressives 7 (6 per cent) were polyglot; a significant difference ($\chi^2 = 21.77$; $df = 1$; $P < 0.001$). There is no significant difference related to the educational or social levels of the patients. The knowledge of two foreign languages in the general Hungarian population is 4.2 per cent (Terestyeni, 1980), not very different from the 6 per cent found in our unipolar patients.

I wonder if good ability to learn foreign languages is related to extrovert (Murray and Blackburn, 1974), cyclothymic (Akiskal *et al*, 1977) or 'attention-seeking' (Zuckerman and Neeb, 1979) aspects of pre-morbid personality found more in bipolar than unipolar patients? Further studies are needed.

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