

How Medicaid Paid \$457,000 for Sesame Oil

By WILLIAM SHERMAN

(Third of a series)

A 76-year-old Romanian-born physician, Emanuel Revici, announced to the world more than 20 years ago that he had developed a cancer drug. Since then, the doctor has claimed to have invented other drug remedies for alcoholism and narcotics addiction.

His remedies have never received ap-

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proval from the federal Food and Drug Administration.

So, city officials were dismayed last fall to discover they had paid out \$457,000 in Medicaid funds for his panacea for drug addiction—injections of sesame oil, sulphur crystals, and other still unidentified compounds at a voluntary hospital here.

The funds went to Trafalgar Hospital, 161 E. 90th St., where Dr. Revici,

a short, stout balding man, is a trustee and the director of internal medicine.

There, on the third floor, between 1970 and 1972, according to the records of the Health Department, about 900 Medicaid patients were injected with substances bottled variously under the names "Bionar," "Perse," and "425-Rex." The drugs were touted by Revici as a cure for heroin addiction.

Joseph A. Cimino, commissioner of the City's Health Department, said yesterday that the city had been unaware of Revici's activities at the hospital for two years. Dr. Cimino called the experiments "unlawful, potentially dangerous, and inadequately controlled." He added that use of a new drug without FDA approval is a violation of the city's Health Code.

The city had no way of knowing what was going on, Cimino said, because the hospital made no mention of the use of the drugs on addicts.

The Health Department, in its audit last November, was also surprised to find that the city had paid for experiments on 260 addicts who were hospitalized several days each with common colds.

These disclosures came as part of **THE NEWS'** continuing Medicaid Probe series, an in-depth investigation into



Dr. Emanuel Revici during interview in his office.

NEWS photo by Ken Koroth

abuses in the city's \$1.3 billion medical assistance program.

Last Oct. 11, Jerome E. Driscoll, the Health Department's director of

psychiatry, visited Trafalgar Hospital and, in a report, said the addicts were

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admitted for diagnosed diseases they did not have, and that even when a disease was appropriately diagnosed, it was not properly treated in many cases.

"In effect," Dr. Driesen wrote in his official report, "they were all brought in for withdrawal from physiological dependency on narcotics, barbiturates, or even alcohol. Then they were returned to the community without after care."

Recently, a reporter visited Dr. Reviel at his office at the Institute of Applied Biology, 144 E. 90th St. He is the scientific director there in addition to his position at the hospital, and it was there that he developed the drugs.

Type A Borscht?

When asked under what sanction he conducted his experiments, since he did not have FDA approval, the doctor replied. "A state health official told me I could inject borscht into my patients if I wanted to. That was between me and my patients." He declined to identify the official.

Referring to the development of his latest drug, "Bionar," used in experiments on addicts at the hospital, Reviel said, "This produces the most amazing results of anything I have developed so far."

Caressing a bottle of one of his drugs in his left hand while he spoke, Reviel said, "After several injections, the addicts eat up and said, 'My God, I feel normal again.'"

Works 18 Hours a Day

He would not disclose the contents of Bionar except to describe it as "butyl-oxy-phenol... a combination of ether and other things in an oily substance."

The doctor, who lives at 1111 Park Ave., insisted, "I'm not in it for the money. I work 18 hours a day to help people."

Reviel, a naturalized American citizen who was licensed to practice medicine in New York in 1947, was born in Romania in 1896. His father was also a physician.

From 1921 until 1941, he said, he participated in research experiments in Bucharest and later in hospitals in France. In 1941, he fled from the Germans to Mexico, where he organized the Instituto de Biologica Aplicado in Mexico City, the forerunner of his institute on E. 90th St.

In addition to these offices, the institute has a laboratory at 101 E. 91st St., where experiments in "cancer" research

and other diseases are carried out on white rats and mice.

"My theory of addiction treatment is that withdrawal pains are caused by an imbalance of fatty acids in the body," Reviel said. "Too much fatty acid with no heroin to balance it off during withdrawal, and the addict feels pain and the need for the narcotic."

"Once we inject something that will neutralize the fatty acids," he said with a gleam in his eye, the addict feels no pain and loses his need for heroin."

Works on 2 Addictions

His theory of acid and alkaline imbalance as causing disease and pain has also been applied in his drugs for cancer and alcoholism. In fact, he said, his drug called "Perse" was used to cure both drug addiction and alcoholism.

Several years ago, he injected several thousand addicts with Perse, he said, "and we achieved remarkable results."

The FDA denied him "investigational drug approval," because Perse contained selenium, a metal which is harmful when taken internally. Still, Perse was used in experiments on addicts at Trafalgar Hospital.

"Once we took the selenium out of Perse, we had a drug similar to Bionar, but I didn't perfect it until about a year and a half ago," Reviel said.

"After three days of treatment with Bionar, the addict is completely free of any pain and any need for heroin."

Again the doctor emphasized that he would realize "no financial gain" from the drug's sale, and said that he did not even



NEWS photo by Ken Korolkin

Benjamin Payn, head of Bionar Corp., told of financing Reviel's research.

have the patent rights to the drug.

An investigation of Health Department records and the interview with Reviel revealed the existence of the Bionar Corp., with an address at 506 Park Ave.

The Bionar Corp., it turns out, is connected with Computat Scientific Systems and another company called Camin Industries. All three are presided over by Benjamin Payn, a 58-year-old businessman.

A News reporter and a photographer found Payn in his offices at the Park Avenue address.

A smooth-talking, well-dressed man, Payn said that Camin Industries "is a firm in electro-coating and mechanical forming of metals." The company earned

\$2,449,806 last year, according to its financial statement.

"I met Dr. Reviel two years ago and was impressed with his experiments," Payn said.

"He needed money, and we gave him about \$100,000 for his research. In return, he assigned us the patent rights for Bionar.

"We took over the financial and commercial interests in the drug, and quite frankly, we did see a large profit potential in it. It is much cheaper than methadone to produce and does not have methadone's addictive qualities."

"I don't expect to make any money out of the drug for while," Payn concluded, "and maybe it will never earn any money."

Sulphur Treatment

The treatment of addicts with Dr. Reviel's experimental drugs has been stopped at Trafalgar Hospital, according to the Health Department.

But not before an exhaustive investigation by that agency showed that \$467,000 in medical funds was paid out.

Investigators for the Health Department found that most of the addicts were "walk-ins off street," and that others were referred to Trafalgar by doctors at Beth Israel Hospital.

Dr. Reviel told THE NEWS that in addition to patients treated with Bionar, and a similar drug he called "425" or "425-Rex", 3,000 other patients were injected with sulphur crystals.

"We achieved marvelous results with the sulphur, but then the patients started getting stomach aches, so we had to discontinue it," Reviel said.

Among the other drugs

in the third-floor medicine cabinets of Trafalgar by Health Department investigators was a drug labelled "Sleep in Water." Nurses who administered the substance intramuscularly said it was "a nother for sleep."

A "nother drug" found was "P C --12." Mrs. Alice Scott, a registered nurse who works at the third-floor station, said it was "put on bread and then given to a patient to eat to stop abdominal pain."

The nurses said that the drugs, including the Bionar and "425-Rex" solutions, were ordered by Dr. Reviel.

Nine nurses on three shifts injected the drugs into the patients last September, two years after the hospital started billing Medicaid for the experiments.

An analysis of patients' records by the Health Department last October revealed that several addicts treated with 425 Rex, a drug the Health Department found to be identical to Bionar in composition, exhibited nervousness, insomnia, and vomiting, right up until the time of their release.

Funds Transmitted

On Oct. 30, Reviel, Payn, and the hospital administrator, Leo Lazarus, were called to the Health Department office at 330 W. 34th St. for an informal hearing.

At the meeting, Steven Rosenberg of the Health Department charged that the patients were treated with experimental drugs, and that under city medicid regulations, the hospital could not be paid for such a program. By then, however, the \$457,000 had already been paid to the hospital.

Dr. Rosenberg also charged that the patients were given Bionar before they received treatment for the ailments cited on the bills submitted to the hospital.

On Dec. 12, a second hearing was held, and this time a representative of the city Corporation Counsel's office concluded that the \$457,000 should be returned to the city.

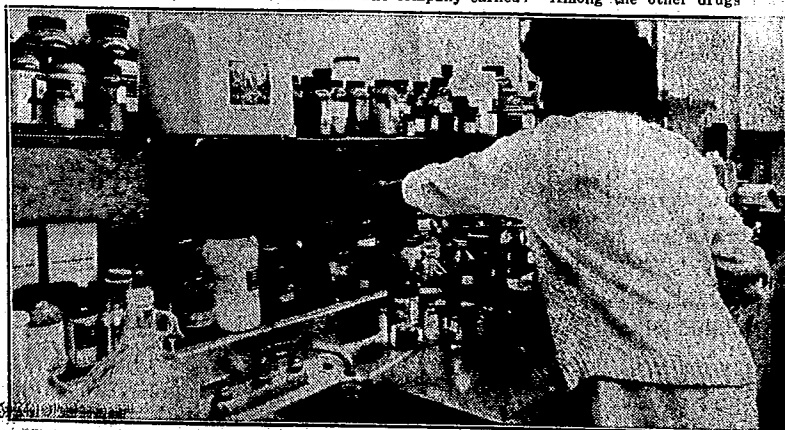
Process of Recovery

Now, the city begins the long and arduous task of trying to recover the Medicaid money.

Last week, Trafalgar Hospital was quietly suspended from the Medicaid Program, and Health Department officials are still unable to determine the effect of the drugs on the addicts.

"We haven't been able to track down the addicts to find out what happened," said Dr. Gimino, the Health Commissioner.

NEXT: Eyeglasses for everyone—whether they need them or not.



NEWS photo by Ken Korolkin

Laboratory at Institute of Applied Biology, where Reviel developed drugs.