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A Bizarre Demonstration

TWO JOHNS HOPKINS Medical School psychiatrists have come up with a bizarre demonstration of what can happen if a patient has enough faith in his doctor.

Drs. Lee C. Park and Lino Covi administered "placebos"—pills containing only sugar—to 15 neurotic patients over the course of a week. All but one reported feeling better at the end of the period.

The unusual twist was that the two psychiatrists told the patients at the beginning the pills contained nothing but sugar.

Six of the group were sure the doctors must be kidding and that the pills must contain medicine of some kind. The other eight accepted the doctors' assurance, but reported feeling better anyway. And the entire group, said the psychiatrists, had indeed improved.

This doesn't mean that the placebo is suddenly going to replace the wonder drugs of modern medicine. But it does show the importance of a patient's faith in his doctor. Apparently, even sugar pills help—if they're dispensed by a man in white.