

## Patients Knowingly Take Fake Pills, Still Feel Better

By THOMAS T. FENTON

In an unusual demonstration of the power of a pill—any pill—the Johns Hopkins Medical School psychiatrists have found that neurotic patients will get better on fake pills even when told they contain no medicine.

Fifteen ailing men and women who came to the Henry Phipps Psychiatric Clinic seeking help were asked to take a bottle of pink pills after being told they contained no medicine whatever.

The doctors were not trying to fool them; the pills contained only sugar.

### Ridiculed By Husband

Yet fourteen of the fifteen took them three times a day for a week, and all fourteen felt better. The fifteenth stopped taking them because her husband made fun of her for wasting her money on "sugar pills."

In their experiment, Drs. Lee C. Park and Lino Covi tested and disproved one of the basic beliefs about the "placebo effect," a device doctors and medicine men

have used for centuries to help their patients.

It has frequently been shown that some patients will improve when a doctor gives them a prescription and tells them, "This will make you feel better." Even though the placebo (Latin for "I shall please") contains no medicine, it frequently works.

But until now, it had always been considered essential that the patient believe he is actually taking a potent medicine.

### Patients Told Truth

For the first time in a placebo experiment, Drs. Park and Covi decided to tell the patients the truth about the pills they were taking — and found that they helped anyway.

They told the fifteen patients they thought a sugar pill would help them as it has helped many others "with your kind of a condition," and carefully explained that "a sugar pill is a pill with no medicine in it at all."

The patients were given a

## Fake Pills 'Cure' Knowing Takers

By THOMAS T. FENTON

(Continued from Page 40)

week's supply of pink capsules in a bottle bearing the label of the Johns Hopkins Hospital and told to come back a week later.

Fourteen came back to tell the doctors the pills had really helped them. (Four even insisted that the pills were the "most effective ever prescribed for them.")

The psychiatrists themselves confirmed that they were "quite a bit better."

Medically, the patients were classified as neurotics who were obviously not alcoholics or suffering from a neurologic disorder. The psychiatrists chose neurotics with signs of anxiety since many scientists have reported that "symptoms related to subjective feelings of apprehension and helplessness" are sometimes helped as much by placebos as by tranquilizers.

(Continued, Page 24, Column 2)