

October 31, 1971

Editor, JAMA  
American Medical Association  
Chicago, Illinois

Sir:

I am writing in reference to the report by the AMA Council on Mental Health, "Narcotics and Medical Practice" in the issue of October 25. While the report repeats the conventional expressions of earlier reports, there are two facets of the treatment of opiate dependence of the morphine type that are presented so poorly as to warrant comment.

After agreeing that methadone maintenance is a logical procedure for community agencies, the Committee recommends this treatment as not feasible for office practice, noting that the individual physician ". . . cannot provide all of the services for the various therapeutic needs of the patient." As I know of no evidence that methadone maintenance is *therapeutic*, nor of any evidence that some 'therapeutic services' affect the course of the disorder in subjects receiving methadone as their primary treatment. Could it be, that the Council is once again presenting *ex cathedra* opinions based on no evidence, to suit some public needs or prejudices? Would it not be more honest to suggest that the fear of illicit distribution of methadone puts the AMA Council on the side of limited distribution, and if ways could be found to use physicians without seepage, that this would be as satisfactory as any other means of distribution that provided medication without seepage?

A second issue is that the section on research repeats the statements of years past, without acknowledgement that some progress has been made in two areas- the use of narcotic antagonists of the specific type (see *JAMA*, 202:191-194, 1967; *ibid*, 215:2108-2110, 1971; *Science*, 169: 1005-1006, 1970) and in the contagious theory of opiate dependence- the latter providing an alternate theory to the conventional 'bad psyche' theory implied in the Committee's recommendations.

There are other discrepancies with experience which suggest that the Council has not taken its charge seriously.

Sincerely yours,

Max Fink, M.D.  
Professor of Psychiatry