

August 5, 1985

Dr. Bracegirdle
Keeper of the Wellcome Museum
Science Museum
Exhibition Road
London SW7 2DD
England

Dear Dr. Bracegirdle,

I hesitate to write the following, as it may appear presumptuous to you, but in a recent visit to the Wellcome Museum, I was struck by an apparent error in the panel #T32. As I have recently written a history of convulsive therapy, and published an autobiography of Ladislav Meduna, I decided I would present my views of the history.

The panel states that "In the 1930's, Manfred Sakel treated schizophrenia by producing convulsions by injecting insulin. This in turn was replaced by . . ." The treatment's origin was more likely in the work of Ladislav Meduna.

Manfred Sakel developed insulin coma therapy, and ardently maintained that the induction of seizures, which occasionally occurred, was a complication to be avoided. He presented his ideas in Vienna in January, 1933. In January, 1934 the Hungarian neuropsychiatrist, Ladislav Meduna introduced camphor injections with the intent of developing seizures, in the belief of a biological antagonism between epilepsy and schizophrenia.

These two protagonists met at a meeting of the Swiss Psychiatric Society in Münsingen in 1937. They differed in their views as to what was the essence of each therapy — coma and the death of 'sick' brain cells in insulin therapy; and seizures in Metrazol therapy. (In later years, Sakel emigrated to New York, and asserted that seizures in insulin coma may have some beneficial effects.)

I enclose a copy of a historical review for your use. A more detailed exposition of the Meduna story is to be found in the first two issues of the new journal, CONVULSIVE THERAPY, in which Meduna's previously unpublished autobiography is published. This biography was written about 1954. Other sources can be found in citation 35 in the enclosed reprint.

I very much enjoyed my visit to the museum.

Sincerely yours,

Max Fink, M.D.
Professor of Psychiatry