Colour in the Doctor's Office.

By Dr. W. Schweisheimer.

WHEN WE ARE IN a one-colour room, a monochrome room, we cannot help being impressed in a certain manner. *Blue*, for instance, is known to usually have soothing effect on neurotic people and neurasthenics. The office rooms of neurologists and psychotherapists are sometimes painted or decorated in a mild blue in order to produce a relaxing effect with the patients.

Melancholic, depressive patients need a more vivid colour to feel less depressed. H. S. Kahm tells the case of a neurotic woman in Maryland who, despite all kinds of cures, did not improve. She felt better in a European spa, but after her return she turned sick again. One of her maids quit after a brief stay because she "just couldn't stand the awful colour of this house." The doctor happened to overhear her comment, and he wrote to the European spa to find out what their colour scheme was. It was a mild blue. At his suggestion the house in Maryland was redecorated according to this scheme, and the patient was cured. The home previously was decorated in bright, supposedly cheerful, colours, with a good deal of red in evidence.

Psychological Needs of the Patients.

Today, more than in former times, colours are decisive in the construction of offices, hospitals and other buildings. The colour in which a wall or object of furniture is painted used to be chosen for its aesthetic effects. But the right colours and colour combinations in our homes and offices, sick-rooms and industrial plants are exceedingly important both for health and efficiency.

The psychological needs of the occupants must be considered. Light colours have a stimulating and cheering influence on most people, producing very much the same effects as would friendly words of encouragement. Dark colours are not so stimulating. Few people are actually aware of those psychological influences; all they know is that they feel attracted by a certain building or a particular room in preference to another, that they feel comfortable in one doctor's office and depressed in another.

Red has a stimulating effect on most people: it increases the working power of the brain. It is well suited for depressive moods. A woman who feels depressed might feel better in a red dress. The Colour Research Institute of America in Chicago recently reported this strange experience. A well-known professional man, deeply depressed, decided to commit suicide by self-starvation. At last he was taken to a mental hospital and placed in a special room which was painted in a bright red. Within 24 hours, by the power of colour alone, his will to live had been awakened and he ate again. Red electric light is used as well to stimulate depressive feelings and shy away thoughts of suicide.

Yellow is another stimulating colour which helps energise the brain. In colour therapy it is used in treating colds, paralysis and chronic conditions. It might be preferable not to wear a yellow dress in an aeroplane; colour experts of airlines have stated that airsickness is induced by a prevalence of yellow and brown, while it is averted by blue and green. Consequently painting and decorating in aeroplanes tries to avoid yellow and brown.

Orange alone is too stimulating in the long run, due to its being a mixture of red and yellow. Only few people like orange-painted rooms.

Green possesses cooling effects and is useful in the abatement of excitement. It is subconsciously associated with nature and health and counteracts brightness of sunlight.

Black is useful for toning strong colours; it is not actually depressing. It is best used in combination with some other colour. White, on the other hand, is cheery; it attracts sunlight. But used alone, both as dress or in a room, it is cold. White has a stimulating effect when it is used with red, yellow or orange. Brown is restful and warming—but somewhat depressing when used alone. Best effects are reached when it is combined with orange, yellow and gold.

Purple and mauve are sedative, soothing colours; they may induce sleep. Purple is a mixture of red and blue, but it seems that the sedative influence of blue is more important in this combination. The latter opinion is not unanimous. Dr. W. S. Wadsworth, a physician interested for many years in the study of colour effects on the human body and mind, points out that purple causes the greatest emotional upset though its effects will vary with the individual. He had the opportunity of studying the effects of colours on the professors who came into his office at the University of Pennsylvania. Among these men were persons, who, although emotionally stable, could not endure prolonged exposure to the purple light; uneasiness and mental restlessness were the consequence.

Colours in Operating Rooms.

In France, the walls of many hospitals are painted a medium blue, and this is supposed to shy away flies that do not like blue rooms. In other countries, for the same reason, abattoirs and factories have bright blue walls. Recently a Chicago cheese manufacturer painted a large factory window blue, to screen out the sun's heat rays; it was discovered that flies no longer congregated outside this window although they were as thick as ever around other windows.

There are other reasons to explain the choice of blue colours in the operating room. They are generally painted in white. Ceilings and walls are white, so is the furniture, and the gowns and towels for doctors, nurses and patients are of an immaculate white. White is the colour of cleanliness. Some surgeons, however, believe that the contrast between the brightly lighted room and the comparative darkness in the depth of the operation wound is too big, and that it means a strain for the surgeon's eye to adapt itself to that quick change every time.

The followers of this theory, instead of white, use bluish-grey, greyish-blue or bluish-green on the tiles and walls of the operating room; only the upper walls and ceiling are kept in white. To overcome the glare of shining bright walls that are in the visual field of the surgeon, various colours have been used not only for the walls but also for the sheets used in the operating field. It seems that a dull French or grey-green for the wainscoting extending to a height of about seven feet, with a lighter grey-green above, has given noticeable satisfaction. A sky blue wainscot has been used with equal effectiveness.

There are many surgeons who do not believe in the soundness of those ideas, and white operating rooms are the majority even in France. Most surgeons consider white sheets and white walls the best possible facility in operating rooms, and they do not feel their eyes to get strained or tense either. White is still generally considered the best guarantee for cleanliness and the best way of providing good illumination as well, and therefore it is the preferred colour of surgical medicine.

Ornaments on the Walls.

For the side-walls of sick-rooms, hospital-rooms and nurseries paints are preferable which may suffer without damage the washing with chemical substances and liquids for disinfecting purposes whenever a new patient moves in, or when the inmate has gone through an infectious disease. The choice of colours in these rooms should consider the general mental condition of sick people. It is undoubtedly better to pick colours on the light side rather than on the dark side. Light colours in sick-rooms are cheering and stimulating for the majority of sick people.

For painting the walls as for wallpaper in sick-rooms no restless, incessantly repeated ornaments and designs should be chosen. Quite a number of patients do not stop examining and re-examining those artistic ornaments and designs.

(To be concluded)

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