

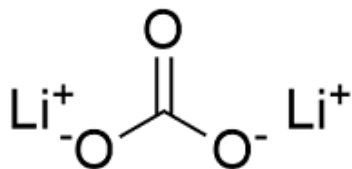
History of Psychopharmacology for the MRCPsych Exam

Exam Syllabus: 4.1 General principles - a brief historical overview of the development of psychotropic drugs.

- The term 'psychopharmacology' describes the scientific study of the effect that drugs have on mood, sensation, thinking and behaviour. It was first coined by David Macht in 1920.

- Some of the earliest descriptions consistent with psychopharmacology come from Hippocrates describing 'excitable mad men' being soothed by springs in 460BCE. It is hypothesized these springs were rich in lithium.

- In India the Sarpaghanda plant (also called *Rauwolfia*) had been used to treat madness. This was described in the 1930s by Sen and Bose. It was later refined to Reserpine and used to treat psychosis.



Lithium carbonate

- In 1949 Cade published his paper in the Medical Journal of Australia showing describing the sedating effects of Lithium on patients with mania. He had started by testing lithium on guinea pigs and then himself.

- In the early 1950's Delay & Deniker and separately Charpentier demonstrated the antipsychotic effects of the antihistamine Chlorpromazine.

- In 1952 Selikoff and Robidzek identified the antidepressant effects of the anti-TB drug Iproniazid.

- Chlordiazepoxide was the first benzodiazepine. It was discovered by Sternbach in 1954.

- Janssen discovered Haloperidol in 1958 and then Risperidone in 1989

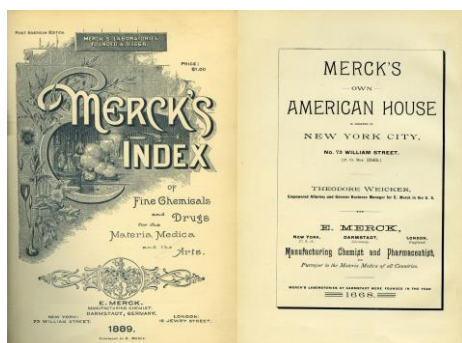
- Merck Laboratories discovered Amitriptyline in 1961



- In 1963 Blackwell first proposed the tyramine 'cheese reaction' as the mechanism for hypertensive crises in using MAOIs.

- Zimeldine was the first SSRI. It was synthesized by Carlson but withdrawn shortly afterwards due to demyelinating diseases following its use.

- The use of clozapine in treatment resistant schizophrenia was identified in 1988 by Kane.



Further reading

- <https://www.bap.org.uk/articles/chlorpromazine-the-first-antipsychotic/>
- <https://www.bap.org.uk/articles/a-brief-history-of-psychiatric-drug-development/>

by Dr Thomas McConnell