Heart Research

And the "Lobby"

By Morton Mintz

FOR THE SECOND year in a row, members of the medical research attack

militants led by philanthropist Starr

Lasker have launched an offensive aimed

at persuading Congress to spend

$7.7 million, in addition to $17.1 million, to study the essentials in heart disease of a single—and patented—prescription

drug, Atromid-S.

In order to succeed, however, the re-

cont must overcome opposition from the

National Heart Institute, skepticism in the

House of Representatives and an ad

barricade — a "corrections letter" — which

the manufacturer, Lytic Labs, turfed to

write to the medical profession last June 13 at the insistence of the Food

and Drug Administration.

"NEW DRUG"

A KEY FIGURE in the Lasker "lobby-

ing" effort, as it is openly referred to in

the Heart Institute, is Dr. Louis M. Kras-

no, clinical research director at United

Airlines in San Francisco. Since April,

1969, he has been trying Atromid-S on

700 men. They are being com-

pared with 700 others who are untreated.

Last October, another 1600 participants

were added.

One signal that the Lasker campaign

was under way came last June 21, when

a favorable, unsigned report on the

Krasno study appeared in Medical

World. This publication was the principal vehicle for an ad for Atromid-

S which was distributed in Ayer's "cor-

rective letter." The claims for which the

formulated were now mixed from the

same source as some of those made by

the Lasker forces.

But the $4 million item failed to clear

Congress. And so a new offensive was

undertaken by the Lasker forces.

On June 24, Dr. Krasno discussed his

study with a select group of reporters

who gathered at Mrs. Lasker's home

on Beckman Place in New York City.

This was disclosed in a piece one story in

the New York Times headlined, "Drug

Curb Hid for Heart Attacks."

The next day, last Tuesday, Dr. Kras-

no appeared for Federal funding in a Senate Appropriations subcommittee

headed by Sen. Lester Hill (D-N.J.). He

is Mrs. Lasker's most dedicated backer

on Capitol Hill.

Even a year ago, the Senator had

been so sold on the idea of an Atromid-S

study that, at the last minute, he added

a $4 million "starter" appropriation to

the Heart Institute budget — without

first trying to get the Institute's views.

Hill had declared himself a believer

after being persuaded by the testimony

in 1967 from Dr. Krasno and others whose

appearances were fixed up by a mutual friend of the Senator and of Mrs. Lasker.

Last April 28, an appeal for starting

money for the Atromid-S study — $17.07 million, that time — was made to a House

Appropriations subcommittee by heart

surgeon Michael E. deBakey and med-

ical statisticians John M. Webster of

the University of Southern California. In

1967 he had joined Dr. Krasno in testi-

mony in behalf of the study given before

Hill.

Rellying on an initial report by Dr.

Krasno of favorable preliminary results, Warner

proposed a massive trial—engaging 15,000

men and women—to find out whether

Atromid-S prevents heart attacks. He

said the drug was "free of serious side

effects."

Yet in the "corrections letter," apparent-ly

apologized for an ad that had failed to

"call attention to the number of the more

serious side effects . . . ." In addition, the

letter conceded that "any implication" that

Atromid-S, which is "solely" for heart

attacks, is in-

valid.

SHORT ORDER

AT THE Subcommittee hearings, Reps.

Neal Smith (D-Iowa) and Roberts H.

Michel (R-III.) were doubtful about the

use of Federal funds to test a single,

patented product. They pointed out, too,

that Atromid-S already is among the four

preparations being tested (in a $33-

million, five-year Heart Institute coronary

drug project. When it ends in 1974,

about 5000 men will have been studied

with the drug to see whether they pre-

vent heart attacks in patients who al-

ready had one.

The upshot in the House was that the

$17.07 million item was omitted from an appro普 rating bill.

At the Heart Institute, a spokesman

said that the Kraa study trial had involved

few people too few, in fact, to allow a time

to warrant "swapping statements" about a need for an expensive study of Atromid-

S alone. The coronary drug project, he

said, had produced "no sound reasons" to

believe that Atromid-S is superior to other products in preventing repeated

heart attacks—or in assuming it to be su-

pervised in preventing initial attacks, in

either men or women. In addition, the

spokesman said, a separate study of At-

romid-S already has been started by

British researchers.