

Book Review

Recovery from the Hell of Schizophrenia

Carlene Hope,

Introduction by Abram Hoffer, M.D.

Morrisville, NC: Lulu Press

2005, Paperback, 187 pages.

"When you are sick of sickness, you are no longer sick," says a Chinese proverb. This is all the more true if you have found a way out of the illness. For the family locked in a 24-hour a day struggle with a child's schizophrenia, *Recovery from the Hell of Schizophrenia* will be both very familiar, and very encouraging reading.

The book is composed of four sections. Part One is an extensive autobiographical prologue. While granting that it sets the stage, to me the strength of the book begins on page 46, as the author's son first exhibits symptoms of mental illness. Part Two is the story of the disease's progression, failed pharmaceutical attempts to contain it, and eventual success with orthomolecular megavitamin therapy. While the narrative is from a mother's vantage point, Part Two concludes with a question and answer session with the patient, and Part Three is entirely devoted to the father's perspective. Part Four is a digest of quotes and passages from seminal orthomolecular writings, introducing the work of Abram Hoffer, Carl C. Pfeiffer, and others.

The author holds little back, describing her experiences with nearly cathartic intensity. But even better, she thoughtfully and repeatedly points the reader to available nutritional solutions. Lists of specific nutrients and doses are provided. She also includes her son's medication reduction diary, and is up front about the fact that although drugs alone were far from curative (and the side effects debilitating), some medication did prove helpful when taken in concert her son's nutritional program. I like the way the

author itemizes and dates specific behavior improvements. Most readers would likely agree that the book would benefit from an index.

Any science teacher who has taught metrics will not be surprised to see that the book contains a repeated unit of measurement error. On pages 97, 128 and 132, the recommended selenium dose is stated as 100 "mgs" (milligrams) twice daily when it should be 100 mcg (micrograms). This is not a nit-pick, since the difference is a factor of 1,000. 200 micrograms of selenium/day is beneficial and completely safe. 200 milligrams/day (200,000 mcg) would be neither. All other nutrient doses are stated accurately.

The overriding value of this book is its simple, sometimes impassioned, but always unmistakable testimony: vitamin therapy works. Having lived this, the author describes her previously hospitalized but now recovered son: "You would never know by looking at him today that he has ever suffered from this disease. Our son is driving. He cooks for himself. He prepares his vitamin packets and takes them on schedule. He no longer sleeps and lives on the couch. He handles his checkbook flawlessly." And, perhaps the most moving maternal comment of all: "He never asks me why I brought him into this world anymore."

So another Chinese proverb comes to mind: "The person who says it cannot be done should not interrupt the person doing it." Results say everything. *Recovery from the Hell of Schizophrenia* is an uncomplicated presentation of simple, safe, and effective niacin-based nutrition therapy, aptly described by the author as "Hoffer's Key." This is the right book for any family that has never known they had a nutritional option, that never had the chance to try it and change their lives with orthomolecular medicine.

—Review by Andrew W. Saul

Healing Schizophrenia: Complementary Vitamin and Drug Treatments

Abram Hoffer, M.D.

CCNM Press, 2004

213 pages, paperback

I squirmed in my seat as I watched *A Beautiful Mind*, a popular film about the brilliant and schizophrenic Nobel laureate, John Nash. I was able, just barely, to refrain from shouting aloud, "Give that man some niacin!" It is probably just as well I kept quiet, and was therefore able to see the entire movie without incurring the combined wrath of ushers and audience. But after reading the work of Canadian psychiatrist Abram Hoffer, M.D., it is not easy to maintain silence about schizophrenia, a disease that affects at least one percent of the population, often with dire and costly consequences.

Interestingly, when Dr. Hoffer meets with newly diagnosed patient, he actually says: "Good news: you have schizophrenia." Patients' reactions surely vary, but Dr. Hoffer does not. He immediately reassures them that they are neither mentally nor morally deficient, but rather that they are nutritionally dependent people, due to a gene-driven biochemical imbalance. He instructs most patients to immediately start taking 3,000 or more milligrams of niacin a day, plus extra vitamins including large amounts of vitamin C, in divided doses. He also requires patients to all but swear off junk food. These steps, along with minimal doses of medication, have resulted in thousands of biochemical cures of this supposedly biochemically incurable illness. In addition to being so responsive to nutritional treatment, schizophrenia is also "good news," Hoffer says, because schizophrenics tend to be especially creative people who are unlikely to ever develop cancer.

Predictably, such an "easy" approach to such a "difficult" disease can only add

up to medical heresy. For an heretic, Dr. Hoffer is remarkably well credentialed: With a Ph.D. in nutrition in addition to his M.D., he was formerly a director of psychiatric research, conducting the first placebo-controlled, double-blind experiments in the history of psychiatry. Perhaps more heretics should have his other expert qualifications: medical journal editor-in-chief for nearly forty years, private practice for fifty years, and some twenty-five books and well over 500 scientific publications.

For those who do not like "schizophrenic" as a label, let it be said that Dr. Hoffer doesn't particularly care for it himself. "The word 'schizophrenia,'" he writes, "serves no useful purpose either in referring accurately to a symptom or a disease, and will some day be replaced by more suitable diagnostic terms." But as a rose by any other name still requires proper soil biochemistry, so do people called schizophrenics need niacin, and plenty of it.

Written in a confident yet unassuming style, *Healing Schizophrenia: Complementary Vitamin and Drug Treatments* covers schizophrenia from inside out, with chapters on cause and symptoms, how it is treated, and how it may be prevented. Hoffer's directions on the fine points of niacin administration and vitamin safety are so enormously valuable that those sections alone make the book a must-read. A significant bonus is the inclusion of a questionnaire from the Hoffer-Osmond Diagnostic Test for Schizophrenia in the final chapter. A recommended reading list is provided, although an index is not.

Long-time readers of Hoffer's work will recognize much in the present book coming forward from his earlier works, *How to Live with Schizophrenia* (1966), *Common Questions on Schizophrenia and their Answers* (1987), and also *Vitamin B-3 and Schizophrenia. Discovery, Recovery, Controversy* (1999). Editing and updating

are both extensive and seamless. Hoffer's remarkable writing style is at the same time both scholarly and, with his many anecdotes, positively entertaining.

For those who may not like the idea of megadose niacin, but like the idea of schizophrenia even less, Dr. Hoffer is the author of choice. Moreover, now that he has retired from active practice, *Healing Schizophrenia* is more than just a timely publication: it is an essential one. To read Hoffer is the very next best thing to sitting down with him.

—Review by Andrew W. Saul

Death by Modern Medicine

Carolyn Dean, M.D., and Trueman Tuck
Belleville, ON, Matrix Verite, 2005
378 pages, paperback

Not even the juiciest crime novel has the word “death” on each and every single page. But *Death by Modern Medicine* does, and it is no work of fiction. There's a coffin at the center of the book's blood-red cover. The “T” in the title word “Death” is fashioned from a physician's twin-serpent caduceus. The lining of the coffin illustration has another large caduceus emblazoned on it. Why? Because, says author Carolyn Dean, M.D., 7.8 million people died from modern medicine just in the years 1990 to 2000. She and coauthor Truman Tuck further assert that we are victims of a “medical system that in its short history of about eighty years, has managed to kill tens of millions.”

A book so devoid of subtlety in presentation had better be accurate and its content well-supported. This book is. With a total of nearly 30 pages of scientific references, *Death by Modern Medicine* in an expansion of “Death by Medicine,” a controversial paper Dr. Dean coauthored¹. That paper, and the present book, glean and tabulate many a grim statistic from

peer-reviewed articles in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, *New England Journal of Medicine*, and other highly reputable sources. Among the authors whose work is considered in detail is former *NEJM* editor-in-chief Marcia Angell, M.D., whose scholarly and scathing attack on the dangers of the pharmaceutical industry I have previously reviewed². Another is respected Harvard health policy analyst Lucien L. Leape, M.D.. Dr. Leape was one of the first physicians to aggressively criticize the safety record of pharmaceutically-based medicine. In 1994, he estimated annual USA medical error deaths at 180,000³. Then, the very next year, *JAMA* published a study by Bates et al⁴ which estimated that hospital injuries kill 280,000 per year.

Now, after considering nearly a dozen additional recognized sources reporting medical fatalities, Dean and colleagues set the actual annual death toll at over 780,000, a dreadful figure. Even if Dean's estimate were to be criticized as high, it simply cannot be tossed aside. Her statistical sources are too good, and the subject is too important. If there has been a competent rebuttal of her work, I am yet to see it.

Death by Modern Medicine does not restrict blame to drugs and doctors. A variety of other topics including cancer research, health care bureaucracy, media bias, chemical pollution, and unhealthy diet and lifestyle, receive due attention in individual chapters. While the facts and figures are always clearly presented and easy to comprehend, there are so many that additional reader-friendly graphics, and an index, would be welcome additions. I think the next printing of the book should dispense with the final few pages, consisting of several mail-in forms that may serve to distract skeptics into questioning conflicts of interest.

Death by Modern Medicine is a very good book. As you read it, you can

sense the unmistakable mark of a narrative that is as highly personal as it is professional. And, while it makes strong, sometimes severe assertions, it invariably backs them up with equally strong references.

Abram Hoffer, M.D., who provides the first of the book's three physician-authored forewords, has probably written the best possible review: "Read this book." That is good advice, and is advice that we can live with. Literally.

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–Review by Andrew W. Saul

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