

Work in Progress

Published monthly by Michele Crawford

Work in Progress is an electronic newsletter intended to assist individuals seeking optimum well-being.

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Feature Article: Part Three: Questioning the Treatment of Anxiety and Depression with Drugs

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1) Note from Michele

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Dear Reader

Welcome to Part Three of Questioning the Treatment of Anxiety and Depression with Drugs.

On May 25, 2006, as part of the Art and Science of Psychotherapy Conference for Mental Health Professionals (organized by Jack Hirose & Associates in conjunction with the Canadian Mental Health Association/ Richmond Branch), I attended Pills or Skills? This was a presentation of a panel of four knowledgeable experts discussing the latest studies in treating anxiety and depression with medication and or therapy.

In the last issue of my newsletter, I highlighted some of the research of Dr. David Antonuccio, Ph.D. and Dr. Henny Westra, Ph.D. In this issue, I will outline the work of Dr. David Burns, M.D. and Dr. Michael Yapko, Ph.D.

A primary message was that the medical model (i.e., diagnoses and treats with medication), is the least efficient means to healing. In other words, the medical model is a highly limited explanation for the intricacy of psychological change. Too many other diverse factors underlie the disorders of anxiety and depression. The medical model underestimates this complexity while ignoring the rights of an individual's self-advocacy in taking control of his or her own life.

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### Part Three: Questioning the Treatment of Anxiety and Depression with Drugs

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Dr. Michael Yapko, Ph.D. proposed an interesting theory. He connected social and technological changes, which take place far too quickly, to elevating information overload and confusion in our lives. The resulting ambiguity can promote anxiety and uncertainty. Since we are bombarded with tons of new information, it's difficult to know what is true and to think critically. We often react by latching onto ideas that appear to make life more effortless and simple.

Dr. Yapko said one such idea has been proposed for forty years: that a pill can help depression and anxiety symptoms by replacing serotonin. However, Dr. Yapko also stated medical evidence fails to support any clinically meaningful benefits of drug therapy and much of the research is manipulated by the drug companies that benefit financially. In fact, selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) are the medications most commonly associated with adverse drug events.

The bottom line, according to Dr. Yapko, is that anxiety and depression is more a social problem than a medical problem. In spite of two dozen different SSRIs being on the market, with new ones being developed as I write this, anxiety and depression are getting worse, not better, during the past 40 years of SSRIs... once again proving the serotonin theory is wrong.

Dr. David Burns, M.D., (familiar to many people because of his books and workbooks on dealing with mood disorders), also pointed out there is no evidence that a chemical imbalance (i.e., serotonin), is the

cause of anxiety and depression. He indicates that although this message has been promoted as fact by drug manufacturers, recent research shows this fallacy has simply been a triumph of marketing over science!

Dr. Burns discussed studies where 35-55% of anxiety and depression sufferers were completely cured using placebos instead of medication. To truly be beneficial, drugs have to out-perform placebos. However, outcomes explicated from 25 studies using both, revealed the drugs were only 1½ points better than placebos. If psychotherapy promised those results, why would anyone come?

Furthermore, he stated that in many other studies, there was no difference between medication and placebos. This information has been suppressed by drug companies (as exposed by information gleaned through the Freedom of Information Act) and independent studies found placebos better at curing anxiety and depression than meds.

It gets worse. In Britain it is illegal to prescribe SSRIs to children and adolescents even though in North America, there is a shocking increase of children being prescribed mood medication. Britain, New Zealand and Sweden's independent research of SSRIs discovered a 600-900% increase in suicide thoughts, attempts and completions.

A study that was released the week of the presentation discovered that it was rare for a depressed individual placed in the placebo group to commit suicide. Dr. Burns also reported the suicide risk component of SSRIs with young people is expected to follow in research with adults prescribed these drugs.

The general public's perception of SSRIs is an excellent example of self-promotion over science: SSRIs are the second most purchased medication at the pharmacy counter. This in spite of the long list of side-effects (ranging from the unpleasant to lethal), and *discontinuation syndrome* (which is rarely explained by doctors prescribing these drugs). Discontinuation syndrome will occur when SSRIs are stopped and many symptoms surface. Of course, individuals assume these are symptoms associated with anxiety or depression. But, they are actually symptoms created by the drug use. No wonder people have so much difficulty detoxing or believing in their own ability to heal.

When the panel of researchers completed their talk, they asked for questions from the floor. When it became evident the audience was not opposed to their justifications, (in fact concurred), the experts all expressed surprise. It had been their universal opinion that people would adversely react to their controversial standpoint given the long-term deluge of advertising and mis-representation of the facts.

Of course, given my long-held views on SSRIs, I was delighted!

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3) About Michele  
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Michele Crawford is a therapist who assists individuals who are struggling with trauma, anxiety or depression. Her passion for her work remains embedded in being able to connect with you in your suffering, helping you find real solutions no matter how complex the issue may be.

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4) Counselling Services  
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Are you prepared to live with more happiness, optimism, confidence, self-worth and hope? If your answer is "yes," then your next step is to contact me for a free 20-minute phone consultation. We can then discuss how I might best help you resolve your problems of Trauma, Depression and Anxiety.

The benefits of counselling with Michele include: significantly reduced stress levels, an optimistic outlook in life, increased confidence and hope.

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