

Dear Luise: A story of power and powerlessness in Denmark's psychiatric care system

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In Denmark, there is an association called 'Død i psykiatrien' (Dead in Psychiatric Care). It consists of bereaved ones and friends of young people who have died while in psychiatric treatment. These families are left alone with their grief, loss and hopelessness. Together, as an association, they created a forum to share their experiences and demand changes to the treatment modalities that led to the death of their loved ones.

Dorrit, the author of *Dear Luise*, is the Chair of *Død i psykiatrien* and the mother of Luise. In 2005, Luise died at the age of 32 after a period of 21 years with administration of different psychiatric drugs: first, anti-epileptics, then more and more other drugs to suppress adverse effects, finally neuroleptics only hours after the first injection of a depot neuroleptic. Luise foresaw that the neuroleptics would kill her and presciently told her mother her tombstone should read, *The medication killed me*.

Different from her daughter, the author calls the cause of death *overdoses of medicine*. This is correct because the drug doses were too much for Luise. But deaths caused by psychiatric drugs, especially neuroleptics, happen after administration in all doses, low and recommended ones. To speak of *overdoses* signals that there are safe doses. In general, psychiatric drugs are 'Unsafe at Any Dose', as Bob Johnson, member of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, says in his homonymous book.

Apart from this different assessment, I fully share Dorit's assessment of her and

her daughter's struggle in the psychiatric system in Denmark and of the 'experts' unwilling to listen to both parents and child. From the age of 11, Luise displayed signs of adjustment problems and unusual creativity, which would today be called 'Asperger's Syndrome'. Doctors, psychiatrists included, administered anti-epileptics, and with the years, a cascade of other psychiatric drugs to suppress their adverse effects. A typical deadly circle.

Dorrit outlines the sequence of events that brought her daughter to death. She does it in short and understated vignettes, interspersed with actual letters she wrote Luise when she was out of reach – as it were in slow motion. How much energy and strength is needed to describe such a tragedy? How much pain must it be for the mother to witness the loss of the daughter again and again. But it happened, and writing the book surely is a form of coming to terms with the catastrophe. And it is a productive form, not only a touching one, but also an educational one. The foreword to both the Danish and English editions is by Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, former Prime Minister of Denmark and Member of the European Parliament dealing with psychiatric issues.

Although the tragedy happened in Denmark, such incidents are happening everyday in all countries with modern drug-based psychiatry. The book is not only for the information of psychiatric workers, but also a warning for patients' relatives. Because the reduction of life expectancy goes along with the epidemic spread of modern so-called atypical neuroleptics, the book, originally published in Denmark in 2011, becomes more newsworthy each day.

Peter Lehmann