

Peter Lehmann (Ed.)

Coming off Psychiatric Drugs

Successful Withdrawal from Neuroleptics, Antidepressants, Lithium, Carbamazepine and Tranquilizers

Two Reviews

Janine Soffe in: *Journal of Critical Psychology, Counselling and Psychotherapy* (United Kingdom), Vol. 5 (2005), No. 1, p. 50

'The Verve' were right, as this book focuses on how the 'drugs don't work, they just make things worse'. But then the majority of us know that anyway don't we?

The book does what it says on the cover. It details the experiences of people all over the world who've been prescribed psychiatric drugs and their journey to realising what 'The Verve' put so succinctly. There are also contributions from mental health workers describing the oft denied phenomena of withdrawal effects and how they have supported those people who have decided to live a life free of psychiatric medications.

This text seems particularly timely given the recent more widely publicised debate around the prescribing of antidepressants such as Prozac and Seroxat and the so-called 'evidence base' purporting to support their effectiveness. Obviously the researchers forgot to talk to people such as the ones who described their experiences in this book, or maybe they did and what they had to say wasn't seen as 'scientific enough', what ever that is.

It is also hopeful reading in giving space for people to tell their stories of managing their lives without psychiatric drugs, thereby contesting the much repeated psychiatric myth that people need to take such drugs for the rest of their lives. I would concur with Loren Mosher that this book should be required reading for all people whose lives are affected by the psychiatric drug industry in whatever form, none more than so than those who prescribe the drugs.

Jeffrey Masson in: *Clinical Psychology Forum* (United Kingdom), No. 43 (2004), p. 40

Read about successful coming off psychiatric drugs, do not run away!

In the preface of the book Pirkko Lahti, Director of the Finnish Association for Mental Health and President of the World Federation for Mental Health, writes:

"Many of my colleagues in the mental health field spend much of their time developing criteria for the application of psychiatric drugs."

She continues:

"Diagnoses and indications often result in a treatment with psychotropic drugs that can last for a long time. ... What risks arise from the withdrawal of neuroleptics, antidepressants and lithium? What factors favor successful withdrawal-successful in the sense that patients do not immediately return to the doctor's exam room, but live free and healthy lives, as all of us would wish? Have we

not heard about pharmacogenetic withdrawal-problems, receptor-changes, super-sensitivity-psychoses, withdrawal-psychoses? Who is able to distinguish relapses from hidden withdrawal problems? Do we not leave our patients alone with their sorrows and problems, when they-for whatever reasons-decide by themselves to come off their psychotropic drugs? Where can they find support, understanding and good examples, if they turn away from us disappointed (or we from them)?"

These questions are so striking that I can only assent to them.

Lehmann does not make a simplistic appeal for the tossing out of psychiatric drugs. He expressly repudiates panaceas. The book has a provocative message; life-experiences sometimes differ from scientific agreements. 28 authors, (ex-) users and survivors of psychiatry from Australia, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, England, Germany, Hungary, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Serbia & Montenegro, Sweden, Switzerland and the USA, managed to come off psychiatric drugs sometimes well, sometimes with problems and sometimes after decades. What is striking is how rarely they received professional help in that process. The fact that the editor found additionally eight professionals, working in psychotherapy, medicine, social work, psychiatry, natural healing an even in a runaway-house, who report on how they helped in the withdrawal process, does not change the central argument that being-left-alone is often the very best remedy.

Learn a lesson from the courageous pioneers, who take responsibility and accompany the often necessarily slow withdrawal with help and advice. I especially recommend the story of Martin Urban's case: "Am I really still disabled?" Psychotherapeutic support during withdrawal from psychiatric drugs". Urban, leader of the section "Clinical psychologists in psychiatry" in the occupational union of German psychologists, shows empathetically how to support people who were declared to have a chronic mental illness in their self-chosen withdrawal: without prejudice, but with respect and devotion-on the basis of an opinion independent of psychiatry. The results of his activity are impressive; he deserves the positive comment added to his story by his patient -read it for yourself in the book.

Regardless of how people working in the psychosocial field assess the motivation and risks of coming off psychiatric drugs, finally it is the users' decision, and they don't behave differently than the rest of society-up to 50% abandon the drugs they were prescribed. It is a good thing that there is this unique new book about a topic which has been badly neglected until now. Moreover, it is fun to read. Loren R. Mosher, the former Director of Soteria Associates and Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at the University of California at San Diego, who tragically died at July 10, 2004 in Berlin, wrote in his preamble to Peter Lehmann's book:

"This book is a must read for anyone who might consider taking or no longer taking these mind altering legal drugs and perhaps even more so for those able to prescribe them."

Jeffrey M. Masson, New Zealand (former Director of the Sigmund-Freud-Archives in Washington, D.C.)