

A pill for every ill

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Too fat, too thin, too happy, too sad: whatever the problem, big pharma has a pill it claims can cure us. Trouble is, nothing comes for free.

“Wonder drugs” of the 1990s, antidepressants are now being swallowed by 50 million people worldwide, and the number is growing. While their dangerous side effects are now emerging, it’s clear manufacturers have downplayed known risks, and regulators and doctors haven’t been skeptical enough to properly protect us.

FACT box:

- You’re twice as likely to kill yourself on an antidepressant than on a placebo.
- ADHD drugs increase heart rate and blood pressure that have lead to death.
- Tranquillizers cause memory loss and confusion.
- Anti-psychotics can cause psychosis.
- ALL psychiatric drugs are seriously addictive and can cause, amongst other things, agitation, a potent predictor of suicide.

How many people are affected adversely or must die from unacknowledged but real adverse drug effects to maintain profit margins?

The good news of the Healthy Mind Body Planet Tour 2006 is that the tide is turning. While use in psycho-pharmaceuticals skyrockets – one in five women in BC was prescribed an antidepressant in 2003 – just as many are rejecting big-pharma’s promise of a pill for every ill. Public confidence in pharmaceutical companies and regulators is plummeting. People are wising up to the marketing lies and are turning to alternatives.

Healthy Mind Body Planet Tour 2006

After the tragic suicide in 2004 of the revered environmental, peace and justice activist Tooker Gombert, I Angela Bischoff, Tooker’s soulmate, began a personal journey of research into the cause of his death. Before long, friends Kelly Reinhardt and Bridget Haworth contributed their multi-media and organizing skills, and the three of us spawned a cross-country odyssey we named the Healthy Mind Body Planet Tour.

By comfort coach on VIA Rail, from April through June 2006, we visited 24 Canadian communities from Halifax to Victoria and every province in between, presenting 27 times to just under 1000 people in library theatres, church basements, cafes and

campuses. We produced and distributed 25,000 Depression Expression newspapers, a 20-page tabloid documenting critical news and views surrounding antidepressant drugs. While on the road we produced video and audio podcasts and posted blogs. We documented people's stories, and shared them with the world, receiving more than 100,000 website hits a month. While the commercial media shut us out, indie-media jumped on board.

What Canadians told us

We were impressed and humbled to witness the depth and breadth of public critique and outrage of the abuse of psychiatric drugs, and to learn of people's positive experiences with alternative treatments based on more holistic and thoughtful mind-body analysis.

Our first tour presentation was with the First Nations community of Elsipogtog, New Brunswick. The elders are turning to the sweat lodge for its cleansing and psycho-spiritual benefits: "Let's go in now, sweat, and pray like there's no tomorrow." Inside all light was obliterated except for the tobacco sparkling on the steaming rocks. The pipe was passed, drum beat, rattle shook and prayers sung. We prayed for the boys and men, for the girls and women, for ourselves, and for our planet – like there was no tomorrow. Not two months later, their chief called for immediate, decisive action by Ottawa to address the impact of drug abuse – legal and illegal – in First Nations communities.

In Fredericton, NB one young woman shared in horrific detail how her antidepressant lead from one adverse reaction to another with serious consequence, through a host of drugs to counter the adverse events. Only after complete withdrawal from all drugs was she able to deal with her original problems.

At our Halifax, NS presentation, one woman, who proudly proclaimed that she was now drug-free after 2 decades of drug saturation, spoke passionately about yoga, diet and aromatherapy in her own healing process. A physician spoke about how new healing modalities, such as acupuncture, are gaining ground in the mainstream medical community. Still another gentleman questioned the definition of mental illness: who defines illness? Why aren't people allowed to have quirks or eccentricities, bursts of energy, or solitary times of retreat?

At our Killaloe, ON event, a woman spoke articulately about the need to supplement our diets with Essential Fatty Acids (EFAs), known to boost brain health. Sources of EFAs are hemp, flax and fish oils. British researchers have found that EFAs can improve the behaviour of rowdy kids and help language skills.

A woman who healed herself of depression spoke of the importance of Vitamin B supplements, which feed the nervous system. Stress, caffeine, sugar, cigarettes, drugs and alcohol all destroy B-complex and C vitamins. She also spoke about the importance of deep breathing. Meditation, yoga, and other athletics teach us to breathe deeply into our

diaphragms, deflecting anxiety, giving us pause to listen to our breath and our bodies, relaxing us. Deep breathing also aids the lymphatic system, our body's sewage system.

In Ottawa, ON a vibrant woman spoke about the grace of yoga to help us touch the earth, and connect our bodies and minds. Yoga practice can lead to improved physical health, emotional well-being, mental clarity, and joy in living.

One woman in Toronto, ON spoke passionately about protecting children from drugging which will impair them for life. While no antidepressants are approved in Canada for children under 19 years of age, doctors are prescribing them to children in unprecedented numbers *off-label* (for a use they were never explicitly approved). On top of it, there is little to no evidence that SSRI use with adolescents (or adults for that matter) is effective, and increasing evidence that the drugs can cause substantial harm including suicidal thoughts and gestures, hostility and aggressiveness.

A man spoke up about the hoax around serotonin deficiency. We've all had it grilled in us for years that depression is a chemical imbalance, and if so can be cured by chemical treatment. But these claims are just not supported by scientific evidence. In fact, the reverse is true – antidepressants cause chemical imbalance which can lead to mania, sexual dysfunction, agitation, muscle spasms, suicidal impulse and ideation, and much more.

In Windsor, ON a woman spoke of her outrage when her daughter's school-teacher suggested she be put on an antidepressant, just because she is shy! The mother refused, and the daughter is now blossoming.

The push to sell drugs is turning healthy people into patients by "disease mongering" and pushing "lifestyle" treatments. Shyness, once an accepted and even admired trait, has been hijacked and given the status of a syndrome treatable with chemistry-altering psychiatric drugs.

In Guelph, ON we were told that 'cyclotherapy' quiets grief. Another woman testified that she healed her depression with a one-week fast that detoxified her body. Yet another woman spoke about the benefit of raw, organic, vegan food in calming and balancing the moods of her foster kids.

At our Hamilton, ON event a couple spoke at length about their daughter, who at 12 years of age suffered anxiety, not uncommon for adolescents approaching puberty. She was prescribed an SSRI antidepressant, and since that first prescription she has cycled through a multitude of antidepressants, tranquilizers, and anti-psychotics. Since going off all antidepressants six months ago, her suicidal urges and actions of self-harm have disappeared. Both parents believe that her behavioral problems and suicidal thoughts were created by her psychiatric prescriptions.

In Winnipeg, Man. a young man testified about his own forced hospitalization. He said that his psychosis got much worse in the hospital while forced to take drugs that made

him disagreeably high. He's now drug free – no street or pharma drugs. He goes for natural highs – music raves, eating nuts, saunas, and lifting weights at the Y.

A woman testified that she is weaning herself off her antidepressant slowly, replacing it with running. There is a plethora of evidence showing that regular physical activity is the best long-term treatment for depression and anxiety. It focuses and calms the mind, burns excess energy, aids digestion and circulation, tones muscles, strengthens bone, gets endorphins flowing, sheds excess weight, and, best of all, makes you feel good.

One woman spoke about how talk therapy based on a feminist analysis was critical in helping her situate her trauma in a larger social and political context of class, race and gender.

In Saskatoon, SK a young woman spoke about being forced to take antidepressant drugs as a teenager, which made her suicidal. She eventually got her power back and turned to healthy food and constant prayer to get her life back on track.

An art therapist spoke to how art provides unique healing and growth experiences, connecting our conscious with our unconscious self. The artistic process taps into the right brain, connecting to symbols, images and perceptions, releasing repressed memories, calming us, enabling self-awareness.

While in Victoria, BC we visited Dr. Abram Hoffer, one of the granddaddies of orthomolecular medicine, a science which aims to correct mental imbalances or deficiencies using vitamins, minerals, amino acids, trace elements, and essential fatty acids. He told us that infant mental illness was very rare 50 years ago. He believes that mercury in modern vaccines, plus food additives and preservatives, sugar and allergies are leading to vitamin and mineral deficiencies that alter our mental states. These deficiencies, he claims, can be cured through nutritional supplementation.

A gentleman at our Victoria presentation spoke about his success self medicating with cannabis (marijuana). There is indeed evidence that marijuana can alleviate symptoms of depression. Marijuana users are also more likely to report positive moods and fewer somatic complaints such as sleeplessness. No surprise millions self-medicate with this herb.

In Vancouver, BC a woman testified how learning about her food allergies helped balance her moods a tremendous amount. Another woman spoke to the power of compassion in getting her through her dark night of the soul.

Canadians from east to west are rejecting the mainstream bio-medical model of pharmacology, which aims to exploit and profit off our vulnerabilities. They're choosing instead compassion, diet, community, exercise, spirituality and common sense.

Passion for change

The pharmaceutical industry's sheer size has helped it "get away with murder." We can rail at corporate greed and government complicity – and we must. But it's also time to say, buyer beware. It's up to us, as consumers, to disregard the hype, to be skeptical, to know that the pill we cradle in our palm may ease our pain, but will just as surely take its toll.

Canadians understand this, more and more each day, with each Vioxx scandal, with each Health Canada adverse reaction warning, and with each loss we face.

Tooker once wrote: "It's time for the passion for change to rush over the planet like a tidal wave."

The tidal wave is upon us.

For more info, details, materials etc. of the Healthy Mind Body Planet tour check out Greenspiration.org