DOSED: The Medication Generation Grows Up

Kaitlin Bell Barnett
Author; Freelance writer for the Boston Globe, Observer, Huffington Post; blogger at PsychCentral.com

March 5, 2013

In the last two decades childhood psychiatric diagnoses have proliferated. Heated debates pop up frequently about the benefits and long-term implications of having young people take psychiatric medication. Yet little is heard from the medicated kids themselves.

That changed with Kaitlin Bell Barnett’s recently-published book Dosed. Ma. Barnett, who started on antidepressants as a teenager, takes an in-depth look at what one psychopharmacologist calls this “giant, uncontrolled experiment”. Her book weaves stories from the “medication generation” together, exploring how spending one’s formative years

cont’d on p. 2

Beyond Diagnoses: How Shared Experiences Challenge Assumptions about Recovery

Gail A. Hornstein, PhD.
Professor of Psychology, Mount Holyoke College; bestselling author; psychologist and historian of 20th-century psychology, psychiatry, and psychoanalysis

May 14, 2013

Dr. Gail Hornstein has always been as interested in patients’ experiences as in doctors’ theories. Her bestselling book Agnes’s Jacket: A Psychologist’s Search for the Meanings of Madness raises significant questions about the traditional medical model and its pessimistic view of full recovery.

On May 14 Dr. Hornstein will share compelling research with us that shows that peer support and psychotherapy can be used successfully with even the most severe forms of mental disturbance. She will highlight the contributions of the international peer movement, including the Hearing Voices Network. This movement is helping thousands of people to understand their experiences and

cont’d on p. 2

The Future of Brain Imaging: Customizing Treatment and Predicting Outcomes

Jeffrey Miller, M.D.
Assistant Professor, Clinical Psychiatry Columbia University/NY State Psychiatric Institute

April 9, 2013

Imagine a brain scan that could predict which kind of treatment will work best for your depression, and estimate the likelihood the treatment would work. Unrealistic? Maybe not.

Dr. Jeffrey Miller’s clinical research aims to make this kind of prediction a reality. His focus is on using brain imaging techniques like PET scans and MRIs to understand the changes that occur in the brain when we get depressed. He hopes this knowledge will help

cont’d on p. 2
Ask the Lawyer  Marc Strauss, Esq.

Has the improvement in the economy had any effect on Social Security Disability Income claims?

It’s probably not the economy, but we’ve recently seen an increase in the turnaround time for people who are waiting at the hearing level. More cases are being pulled out of the queue and sent to a special unit for review. When this happens, the claimant is given 10 days to submit additional evidence, and the case is expedited. The important lesson: if you’ve filed for SSDI make sure that you’re under the care of a professional and keep your records current! Approval of benefits often hinges on being able to provide medical evidence that you have a disability.

Can children under the age of 18 get SSDI?

No, but they may be eligible for regular Social Security Indome, if the family’s household income meets the criteria for financial need. An adult child between the ages of 18 and 22 may be eligible for "Adult Child Disability" if he or she has a parent who is deceased, retired, or disabled and the adult child can prove that his or her own disability began before age 22. In this case SSDI is based on the parent’s employment record.

Any other big news?

Residents of Queens who have appeared at a hearing and been denied by certain named administrative law judges in the past five years may get a second chance for a hearing. A recent class action lawsuit brought against the Queens Hearing Office resulted in an order to have the chief judge replaced and four other judges retrained. We won’t know exactly what will happen until the plan is finalized by Federal judges, but once the settlement is accepted the Social Security Administration will send out notices to those people who are eligible to reapply.

Future of Brain Imaging lecture  cont’d from p. 1

us predict outcomes with more certainty, and give us insight into which medications and cognitive therapies will work best for each of us.

How far away from this goal are we? Not as far as you might think. Join us on April 9 for an update on the progress Dr. Miller and his colleagues are making.

Beyond Diagnoses lecture  cont’d from p. 1

help each other recover. Join us as Dr. Hornstein challenges our assumptions and beliefs about suffering and healing, and offers an alternative and optimistic view of the changing landscape of mental health today.

What’s in the MDSG Web Site?

If you haven’t been to MDSG.org lately, you may be missing out. Aside from being a great source of lecture dates when you misplaced your copy of MOODS, the site has lots of great information. Visit us to find:

• Announcements;
• copies of recent and past newsletters;
• a fabulous list of resources including info on how to find trustworthy sources online, drug information, online discussion forums, and advocacy groups;
• links to other online sites that may be helpful to you.

Take a look!
Dosed : The Medication Generation Grows Up
by Kaitlin Bell Barnett
Beacon Press, 2012

Children often suffer from the same symptoms of depression, anxiety, obsessions, compulsions, and attention deficit disorder as adults. Psychotropic drugs are prescribed for all these problems. But what happens when school-age children take Ritalin, Zanax, Prozac, Zyprexa, Depacote or other drugs? In Dosed, author Kaitlin Bell Barnett takes a comprehensive look at this 21st Century phenomenon.

The author follows five young people as they describe their life experiences. The profiles begin with their first diagnosis and first prescription. She also writes about her own life, living with depression (and a Prozac prescription) starting at age 17. One suspects her personal experience influenced her choice of inquiry for this book.

The haranguing thoughts of mental illness, which can often be lessened by medication, do their own damage. But the additional worry about drug poop-out and dependence weigh heavily on a young mind. Kids question themselves: Could I read as fast if I weren't taking Ritalin? Is this a normal feeling, or is it a side effect? How can I know who I really am if I'm taking these drugs all the time?

Medication can add its own set of issues, causing flat affect that dampens social skills, obesity, and confusion about sense of self.

One well-known controversy about medicating children has focused on Ritalin, which treats the symptoms of ADHD. When a stimulant is working, school kids are able to calm down and learn. The effect can be profound; one child in the book says, "When I am taking it, teachers treat me like anyone else." While this may be a plus, some kids feel that the pill determines their behavior: they attribute good behavior to the pill, and out-of-control times to forgetting to take it.

Kaitlin Bell Barnett interviewed dozens of people about growing up on medication. Most of these people believed that drugs had "made them more stable, motivated, focused, reliable, or upbeat." And yet they were still ambivalent about issues like "what side effects the medications caused and how to understand their identity while taking a drug that affected their mood, behavior, and maybe even their entire personality."

Many of us in MDSG began our psychiatric journey when we were young. Those in the medication generation will identify with the kids in Dosed. The book is also of interest to parents whose children currently take medication. But even if you’re not in either group, this is a book worth reading. It’s not a tirade against (or for) medication, but a nuanced view of what kids go through, and how their disease and medications affect how they grow up.
The Mood Disorders Support Group

Upcoming Lectures — Spring 2012-13

Held at the Podell Auditorium, Bernstein Pavilion, Beth Israel Medical Center
Enter at Nathan Perlman Place between First and Second Avenues and 15th and 16th St. Doors open at 7:00 p.m., lectures begin at 7:30 p.m. $4 for members, $8 for non-members.

March 5  
Tuesday  
7:30 p.m.  
DOSED: The Medication Generation Grows Up  
Kaitlin Bell Barnett, Author; Freelance writer

What effect does growing up medicated have on children? A fascinating look at the complicated issues surrounding growing up “Dosed”.

April 9  
Tuesday  
7:30 p.m.  
The Future of Brain Imaging: Customizing Treatment and Predicting Outcomes  
Jeffrey Miller, M.D., Assistant Professor, Clinical Psychiatry Columbia University/ NY State Psychiatric Institute

How far are we from being able to predict which kinds of treatments will work best to treat depression? A sneak peek at exciting developments in brain imaging.

May 14  
Tuesday  
7:30 p.m.  
Beyond Diagnoses: How Shared Experiences Challenge Assumptions about Recovery  
Gail A. Hornstein, PhD, Professor of Psychology, Mount Holyoke College; psychologist and historian of 20th-century psychology, psychiatry, and psychoanalysis

How important — and effective — is peer support in recovery? There’s research that tells us, and which may alter our understanding of what may help us most.

Weekly Support Groups

**Manhattan West Side**

**Wednesdays**
St. Luke’s Roosevelt Adult Outpatient Psychiatric Clinic
411 West 114th Street  
(between Amsterdam and Morningside)

**Manhattan East Side/Downtown**

**Fridays**
Beth Israel Medical Center, Bernstein Pavilion, 2nd floor
Nathan Perlman Place (between 15th & 16th Streets, and First & Second Aves)

MDSG Membership

Send your check, payable to MDSG, Inc. to: MDSG, Inc., P.O. Box 30377, New York, NY 10011

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Your contributions are tax-deductible. Thank you for your support.
Depression Sees No Borders  Li Faustino, PhD

In 1996 I showed up at an MDSG group, saddened and concerned about a family member. Soon I trained and ran groups, founded the group for young people, and led one of the sites. Over the years I’ve had various roles at MDSG including recruiting, teaching and training volunteers to answering phones, and raising money. Today I still sit on the board of directors.

The bulk of my time and focus has been on what is now called the Under-30 group. When that group started in 1997 it had six people in it. Each week it grew until it became so big it was split in two, and was the biggest group of its kind in the country. Each week brought newcomers who assimilated with those who had come the weeks before. They had Depression, Bipolar Disorder, Schizoaffective Disorder. Their stories had different details, but the same overarching theme: they were suffering. Some group members were piecing their lives back together after horrendous episodes. Some had just started treatment and walked straight from the hospital to the group. Some went from the group straight to the hospital. Many were figuring out how to explain their illness to their families, or grappling with when (or if) to tell a prospective partner about it. People talked, shared, suffered together. I saw the work of a support group at its best.

It is now 2013. I have completed my doctoral degree in clinical psychology. I no longer run support groups. I work in a different state. I sit in my office and see people with a myriad of difficulties. Very often someone comes in and – because of my years with MDSG – I know what I am seeing. They are just the right age, and I recognize the suffering, the isolation, the pain. I see their struggle to keep hope alive. I swallow the reality that mood disorders know no boundaries and have no borders. They hit people everywhere.

I wish I could send all these people to MDSG, where I witnessed so many people making progress toward recovery. For although psychotherapy and medication are often the centerpieces of successful treatment, the power of a solid support group should never be underestimated. People need to discuss the issues that go along with managing their lives with a mood disorder. Recovery is far easier when you can talk openly about relationships, family, stigma, taking medication, identity, school and work, sleep, and the challenges of having a social life. Within the safety of an MDSG support group, people get ideas – and get empowered. I’m grateful for how MDSG has enriched my life. I wish it to enrich many others.

Movie: Silver Lining Playbook

How often have you seen a Academy Award-nominated movie in which one main character has Bipolar Disorder, and another OCD? It doesn’t happen frequently!

One of the interesting aspects of “Silver Lining Playbook”, which stars Bradley Cooper, Robert De Niro and Jennifer Lawrence, is that the characters’ emotional struggles and mental illnesses affect the plot but don’t define who they are. In other words, the movie is about people who face an obstacle that has to be dealt with and overcome, and that obstacle happens to be a mental illness.

Dr. Jeffrey Lieberman, chair of psychiatry at Columbia University and the president-elect of the American Psychiatric Association, thinks that “Silver Lining Playbook” will help to decrease stigma, because its message is “that mental illness affects ordinary people in normal domestic settings.” Do you agree? Disagree? Watch the movie, and let us know!

Send us your movie review at info@MDSG (please put “Movie Review” in the subject heading) and we’ll choose some excerpts to include in our next newsletter.

ME2, a Bipolar Orchestra

BBC News recently ran a piece about Ronald Braunstein, a conductor whose highly successful career was derailed by Bipolar Disorder. One of the major obstacles Braunstein faced was stigma: orchestras didn’t understand (and didn’t care to understand) the nature of his illness.

What makes this news is that Braunstein has gone on to do something new. He’s put his Juilliard training to good use, and has founded a stigma-free orchestra in Vermont for amateur musicians who have mental illnesses.

Known as ME2, the group focuses on making music in order to bring beauty into the world — and confidence into their lives. Participation is open to anyone who suffers from a mental illness, their families, and friends. No audition is required.

You can learn more about ME2 by visiting their web site at me2orchestra.org. There’s a link on the site so you can watch the BBC “First Person” segment about the group, too.

Next up... New York?
Stay Healthy, Keep MDSG Healthy

We all know it takes a huge amount of work to keep ourselves stable and healthy. MDSG plays a key role in supporting us in those efforts. The cost of membership and lecture admission doesn’t come close to covering our expenses. Your financial support is crucial. Please give what you can.

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