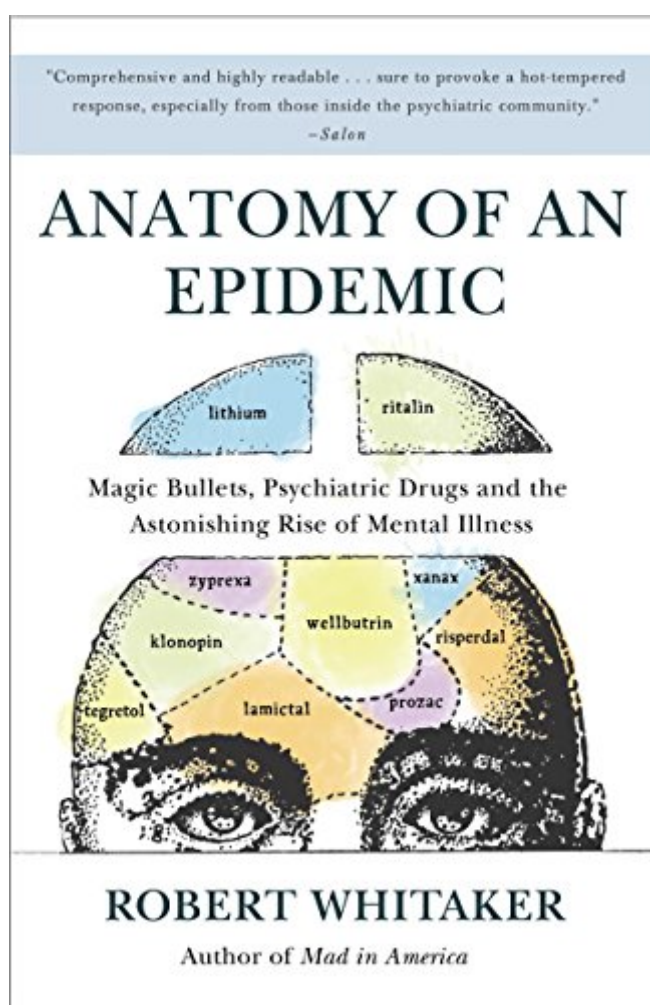


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# Anatomy Of An Epidemic: Magic Bullets, Psychiatric Drugs, And The Astonishing Rise Of Mental Illness In America



## Synopsis

Now with bonus material, including a new foreword and afterword with updated research. In this astonishing and startling book, award-winning science and history writer Robert Whitaker investigates a medical mystery: Why has the number of disabled mentally ill in the United States tripled over the past two decades? Every day, 1,100 adults and children are added to the government disability rolls because they have become newly disabled by mental illness, with this epidemic spreading most rapidly among our nation's children. What is going on? *Anatomy of an Epidemic* challenges readers to think through that question themselves. First, Whitaker investigates what is known today about the biological causes of mental disorders. Do psychiatric medications fix "chemical imbalances" in the brain, or do they, in fact, create them? Researchers spent decades studying that question, and by the late 1980s, they had their answer. Readers will be startled and dismayed to discover what was reported in the scientific journals. Then comes the scientific query at the heart of this book: During the past fifty years, when investigators looked at how psychiatric drugs affected long-term outcomes, what did they find? Did they discover that the drugs help people stay well? Function better? Enjoy good physical health? Or did they find that these medications, for some paradoxical reason, increase the likelihood that people will become chronically ill, less able to function well, more prone to physical illness? This is the first book to look at the merits of psychiatric medications through the prism of long-term results. Are long-term recovery rates higher for medicated or unmedicated schizophrenia patients? Does taking an antidepressant decrease or increase the risk that a depressed person will become disabled by the disorder? Do bipolar patients fare better today than they did forty years ago, or much worse? When the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) studied the long-term outcomes of children with ADHD, did they determine that stimulants provide any benefit? By the end of this review of the outcomes literature, readers are certain to have a haunting question of their own: Why have the results from these long-term studies "all of which point to the same startling conclusion" been kept from the public? In this compelling history, Whitaker also tells the personal stories of children and adults swept up in this epidemic. Finally, he reports on innovative programs of psychiatric care in Europe and the United States that are producing good long-term outcomes. Our nation has been hit by an epidemic of disabling mental illness, and yet, as *Anatomy of an Epidemic* reveals, the medical blueprints for curbing that epidemic have already been drawn up.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Very science based. There's a bunch of reviews on here that say this book is invalid, but when you dig into their reasons, they are cherry picking data and using disproven research. For instance, a lot of critics of this book say, "Oh, of course antipsychotics help people," and they cite a few studies. But when you look at those studies, it's where people have been dropped cold turkey off meds they had taken long term. Well, cold turkey withdrawal of psych meds is a hard and nasty process. So of course leaving people on drugs works better than dropping them suddenly into cold turkey withdrawal. But gradual withdrawal does work, and many people have gotten their lives back by learning how to use psych drugs appropriately as a tool instead of as the entire solution. Whitaker is not anti-medication, many of his supporters still use medications. Whitaker is not anti-psychiatry. He is anti-bullshit. Many psychiatrists support him, and are referenced in this book. But only the ones who have actually taken the time to learn the academic research in their own field. Don't believe the critics who cite 2-3 studies and think they have discredited this book without looking into details. This book cites like 400 studies, works with all the best patient advocates in the industry, and is the best science has to offer to explain both problems and solutions. If you want to know the real deal,

this is the book to read. Most critiques of this book are very shallow, and have already been readily and easily disproven.

Many of the harshest reviews of this book seem to be coming from those who currently depend on psychiatric medications, and find the author's conclusions heartless, given their own distress. As a person diagnosed with MDD (major depressive disorder) 22 years ago, and medicated with a substantial cocktail of psych drugs for 20 years after that diagnosis, I want to add my perspective to this discussion. My life is better without the medications. I can't say that will be true for everyone, but it is true for me. I read Robert Whitaker's book almost two years ago, and his conclusions alarmed me. I also had to honestly wonder, do I really feel better on all these medications than I would without them? I had been told by well-respected psychiatrists at two major research universities that the only way to prevent recurring depressive episodes was to be on medication for life. I had believed them, and taken the medications. I felt reasonably okay a lot of the time, though somewhat dulled and flattened by the meds. But I still had debilitating depressive episodes, sometimes lasting for months, in spite of the medications. As I looked around at my many, many friends and family members on psychiatric medications, it seemed to me that most of them were still pretty substantially depressed a lot of the time. For years I had found the notion of "chemical imbalance" reassuring. The solution to my mental distress "medication" was no different than if I had diabetes and needed insulin, apparently! Taking psych meds with this perspective makes you feel that you are doing your best to take care of yourself, which is reassuring when you're still feeling awful. You're doing what you can do. "Better living through chemistry!" I used to wryly joke, as I'd down my cocktail of three or more medications every night. I regularly saw my psychiatrist, who would tweak the meds here and there to give me better relief. How sad that the "chemical imbalance" theory just doesn't hold up to actual research! I understand how doctors came to use that analogy to reassure patients who were alarmed at the prospect of being on mind-altering drugs for long periods of time. But there are no chemicals being balanced here. The drug effects are powerful, but they are not restoring what is missing and replicating a healthy brain. That truth, well researched in this book, needs to be told. After reading "Anatomy of an Epidemic" two years ago, I was convinced that I at least needed to try life without medications. My husband is a physician, and he found the research in the book compelling as well. I did a very slow, careful taper off of my psych drugs, over a period of months (this part is absolutely crucial). The side effects of withdrawing were physically painful at times, but I got through them. I've been off psychiatric medication for over a year and a half, and I feel really good. Do I still get depressed? Yes, sometimes I do. But certainly

not more depressed than I did on the medications. I really appreciate having the full range of my emotional reactions restored to me. It's dreary having the ecstatic side of life chopped off, along with the abject misery. Drugs do that. And psychiatric medications have frightening long-term consequences, some of which are only coming to light now that people have been on them for decades. If medications are truly needed, in most cases they should be temporary, not long-term. Life is hard, stress is real, and problems need to be dealt with. There is no magic bullet. I have found daily aerobic exercise to be a far more reliable way of mitigating depression than my former medications, and research in this book shows this to be true for a majority of people as well. Mindfulness meditation has also helped, and kind people who listen to me. I don't blame my doctors for my years of overmedication. They were doing the best they knew how for me, given the way that training is passed down doctor-to-doctor through medical education. The "medical model" of psychiatry saved that branch of medicine from dying out, given our insurance-based healthcare system, and Robert Whitaker does a great job of exposing the collusion between the pharmaceutical companies and the American Psychiatric Association, with its frightening consequences. I found the section of the book describing the way research evidence was "rewritten" for medical school textbooks truly alarming. There's a lot at stake here for the psychiatric profession; it's not surprising that so many psychiatrists turn from this research with alarm and denial. I admire Robert Whitaker for bringing this problem to light, and for doggedly pursuing it both in the US and internationally. I recommend his website "Mad in America" for recent news and discussion.

This is a very well written case against the use of psychiatric drugs. Working in the medical field myself, it was rather eye opening. I am giving the author only 4 stars because his logic is a bit to one sided for me. Nevertheless, I will be looking into changing my practice and reading up on new study results.

This is an informative look at how the medical profession and American consumers fell in love with "Big Pharma" and the implications of that love affair. We have all been raised to believe that there is a magic pill for all our ills, including the psychological ones. Though the pharmaceutical industry has come through with great treatments for physical diseases, the results for mental illnesses have been troubling. In some cases the treatments have turned out to be worse than the diseases they tried to cure.

Great read, it will definitely open your eyes to the "wonders" of pharmacology. Definitely changed my view of wonder drugs and their role in medicine. The mind is an extremely complicated place and drugs that operate on it really aren't that black and white. Good read but also know that this has a slight bias so try not to become a weird extremist after you read this. Still think for yourself.

I purchased this book as part of a personal project and, the further I get in it, the more interested I am. Robert Whitaker does a great job of using the facts to show his point and pointing out flaws with many medications and techniques that are still used today. The material is shocking and displayed in an entertaining way. I would recommend this book to anyone interested in medication, psychology, psychiatry, or any related fields. It does get a bit dense with numbers and studies at times, but as long as you can understand it all, it's no problem.

One of the best books ever written about the shameless criminal relationship between the pharmaceutical industry and the institution of psychiatry.

This is a slow read for me. Nevertheless, I am astounded at every turn. This information is so long overdue. We are lucky to have such dedicated writers.

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