

The Problem with Medicating our Problems

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Psychiatric drugs have, for decades, benefitted the seriously mentally ill and eased the suffering of millions. And Psychopharmacology, the study of these drugs' effects on the brain, has enabled numerous life-changing treatment options. Yet, despite these advances for the field of psychiatry as a whole, the idea of throwing pills at our problems has been proven ineffective, and its time is coming to an end.

Psychiatric medications come in several forms, though among the most commonly prescribed are antidepressants, stimulants, and mood stabilizers. They are so regularly prescribed, in fact, that one of the questions most often asked of me by new patients is how long I need to talk to them before writing a prescription. They expect the same experience in my office that so many have had with other doctors in the past—they feel unsettled, they seek help, they get pills. And while prescriptions may offer temporary relief of symptoms, patients are not always aware that they also come with very serious risks.

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Patients need to know that psychiatric medications may cause:

- Alarming side effects, including sexual dysfunction
- Other medications to malfunction
- Dangerous health problems, such as difficulty breathing and diabetes
- Disturbing withdrawal symptoms, including seizures
- Decreasing efficacy

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As a medical doctor and therapist, I have seen first-hand the harmful effects of our dependence on medications for resolving emotional issues. Counter to current treatment trends, the use of medication alone increases the duration, and sometimes the intensity, of common emotional problems. Often, medication simply masks the symptoms, a course of treatment that would be deemed unacceptable in any other field of medicine. For example, few people would be satisfied to treat the headaches caused by a brain tumor with ibuprofen alone. Rather, we would seek to eradicate the problem at its source. The same should be no less true for our emotional health issues because, unlike acute mental health conditions such as schizophrenia and some bipolar disorders, common complaints such as anxiety and depression are often not based on biology. And yet, most patients seeking help for these conditions are being treated with biology-altering pharmaceuticals. The condition clearly does not warrant the intervention.

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The most effective course of treatment, by far, is what I have used with patients in my practice for nearly twenty years: psychodynamic therapy. To treat the real source of emotional problems, we must discover its source, a process to which therapy is expertly suited. With the right guide, a patient can be led to discoveries about their history, their beliefs and their feelings, all of which, in turn, affect the success of their daily lives and relationships. When we discover how we got to today's state, we can change the path towards tomorrow.

Despite being an MD, I avoid prescribing medications as often as I can, and when they are necessary, I use them very cautiously. As physicians, we must guide our patients in the knowledge that medication alone is not a treatment, it's simply a mask.



Learn more about how Dr. Dabney can help you at drladabney.com