

Anatomy of an Epidemic: Robert Whitaker speaks about Magic Bullets, Psychiatric Drugs, and the Astonishing Rise of Mental Illness

The acclaimed American investigative journalist Robert Whitaker, author of several books on mental distress, is on a speaking tour of Ireland from 27 February to 2 March 2011. He will speak about the research and conclusions in his important new book, *Anatomy of an Epidemic: Magic Bullets, Psychiatric Drugs, and the Astonishing Rise of Mental Illness in America*.

In this book, Robert Whitaker investigates the astonishing rise of mental illness. Why has the number of adults and children disabled by mental illness skyrocketed over the past 50 years? Why does this epidemic parallel so closely the growth and dominance of psychiatric drugs as treatment?

The acclaimed US medical journalist documents a history of science and medicine that raises a heretical question: Could the drug-based paradigm of care be fueling this modern-day plague?

Whatever the short-term effects of psychiatric drugs, where many trials suggest they can be effective, Whitaker analyses the full history of their use and asks:

What about their long-term effects?

He carefully documents an answer to that question for four major psychiatric disorders and for child and adolescent disorders. The answer is frightening. **The drugs worsen long-term outcomes — and recovery from debilitating mental states has become rare.**

Whitaker concludes we need to start an open conversation about how to stem the epidemic of disabling mental illness in society and move to a paradigm of care that helps people get well and stay well over the long term.

Robert's tour dates:

FRIDAY 25 FEB: ATHLONE: Public lecture 'Assessing the Long-term Effects of Psychiatric Medications'.
Venue: Room J1007, Department of Nursing, Athlone Institute of Technology, Athlone. 11.00 am - 2.00 pm.
Organised by The Irish Network of Critical Voices in Mental Health.

MONDAY 28 FEB: CORK: Public lecture 'Epidemic Exposed: Are Magic Bullets an Illusion?'
Venue: Carrigaline Court Hotel, Carrigaline, Co Cork. 7.30 pm. Organised by MindFreedom Ireland.

SATURDAY 26 FEB: DUBLIN: Public Lecture 'Is the bio-psychiatric approach causing an epidemic of psychiatric disorders?'
Venue: Arts Faculty Building, Trinity College Dublin, 2.00 pm.
Organised by the School of Nursing and Midwifery, TCD, and co-sponsored by the Irish Network of Critical Voices in Mental Health (aimed at students, staff mental health professionals and health officials — must pre-book)

TUESDAY 1 MARCH: Public lecture. Venue: Boole Lecture Theatre 2, University College Cork, 6.00 - 8.00 pm.
Organised by the School of Nursing and Midwifery and the School of Applied Social Studies. Co-sponsored by the Irish Network of Critical Voices in Mental Health

WEDNESDAY 2 MARCH: Public lecture 'Anatomy of an Epidemic' 7.30 pm D4 Ballsbridge Inn (formerly Jury's). Organised by Seminars.ie, sponsored by The Wellbeing Foundation and Renew. Tickets from Seminars.ie

FROM WHITAKER'S RESEARCH:

- In 2007, Martin Harrow, a psychologist at the University of Illinois, College of Medicine, reported on the 15-year outcomes of a large group of schizophrenia patients he has been following since the 1980s. Forty percent of the patients “off medication” had completely recovered, which was eight times greater than the recovery rate for those on antipsychotic drugs.
- In a 1995 study of patients with major depression, investigators from the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) reported that over the course of six years, those who were “treated” for the disorder were three times more likely than the unmedicated group to suffer a “cessation” of their principal social role, and seven times more likely to become “incapacitated.”
- Forty years ago, bipolar illness was a rare condition and long-term outcomes for patients so diagnosed were fairly good. Today, there are nearly six million adults in the United States with this diagnosis and their long-term outcomes are poor.
- In the 1990s, the NIMH mounted its first long-term study of a childhood mental disorder (ADHD). At the end of 14 months, the children treated with a stimulant were doing slightly better than those who weren’t medicated. However, at the end of three years, “medication use was a significant marker not of beneficial outcome, but of deterioration.”

Robert Whitaker is the author of four books, two of which tell of the history of psychiatry. His first, *Mad in America: Bad Science, Bad Medicine and the Enduring Mistreatment of the Mentally Ill*, was named by *Discover* magazine as one of the best science books of 2002, while the American Library Association named it one of the best history books of that year. His newest book, *Anatomy of an Epidemic: Magic Bullets, Psychiatric Drugs, and the Astonishing Rise of Mental Illness in America*, investigates the explosion in the number of disabled mentally ill in the United States.

Before writing books, Robert Whitaker worked as the science and medical reporter at the Albany Times Union newspaper in New York for a number of years. His journalism articles won several national awards, including a George Polk award for medical writing, and a National Association of Science Writers’ award for best magazine article. A series he co-wrote for *The Boston Globe* was named a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in 1998.

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