

Psychiatry: Yesterday (1950) and Today (2007)

From Despair to Hope with Orthomolecular Psychiatry

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2008, Trafford Publishing, 150 pages www.trafford.com

Every year, thousands of patients visit psychiatrists, outpatient clinics and mental hospitals seeking help for depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety, schizophrenia, attention deficit disorder, anorexia, autism, stroke, epilepsy, dementia and other distressing brain conditions. Busy psychiatrists, overwhelmed and overloaded, assign diagnostic labels and manage symptoms by prescribing meds, talks and shocks. Do those therapies actually heal sick brains? Readers of this book will learn that many patients and their families despair of finding restorative care for mental illnesses. At age 91, with six decades of experience as a clinician, researcher, teacher and author, Abram Hoffer, PhD, MD, FRCP(C) knows about psychiatry: yesterday (1950) and today. Dr. Hoffer surveys the field, charts the mental healthcare maze and guides us to quality care. Over his long and distinguished career, Dr. Hoffer spent decades researching and developing orthomolecular psychiatry as a restorative dimension of care, healing patients and educating the public.

As you read, you will realize that Abram Hoffer is a rare psychiatrist, one in a thousand. With a PhD in biochemistry, Hoffer's education, laboratory experience and observation skills proved useful during his medical studies. After graduating from the old school when medical students were taught to respect patients and above all, to do no harm, Abram Hoffer became a physician in 1949 and then a psychiatrist. He learned to assess each patient, check for infections (such as syphilis) and test for medical problems (such as thyroid, adrenal, blood sugar and hormone disorders). Hoffer noticed that episodes of psychosis can have a number of causes; he was trained to consider the underlying cause(s) of each patient's symptoms before recommending any treatment(s). If patients go psychotic after years of untreated syphilis, can antipsychotic meds, electric shocks or talk therapies heal them? Not likely. Those patients need antibiotics. If patients starve or ingest food artifacts, can meds, shocks or talks heal them? No. Those patients need nutritious diets. If patients become psychotic when they have hormone problems or thyroid, adrenal or blood sugar disorders, will meds, shocks, or talks heal them? Not likely. Those patients need specific medical care. Dr. Hoffer treated psychotic patients according to the practice guidelines of psychiatry: he noted mental status exams, took careful patient and family medical and mental histories, ordered medical tests and made differential diagnoses before recommending safe and effective treatments.

With his medical school training and his PhD in biochemistry, in the 1950s Dr. Hoffer began to research the chemical basis of psychiatry and develop restorative regimens for patients with schizophrenia, psychosis, anxiety and depression. If patients had neurotransmitter imbalances, food sensitivities, cerebral allergies or toxic overloads, Hoffer learned to help them. One evening while sitting at his kitchen table, Hoffer studied the chemical formulas of the hallucinogens such as mescaline. Eureka - he spotted an indole structure! He wondered if the human brain could produce indoles. Might those i-metabolites cause hallucinations or perceptual distortions? By tracing the metabolic pathways of tyrosine, adrenalin, noradrenalin and dopamine, Dr. Hoffer found indoles in the human brain. Hoffer reasoned that irreversible oxidation can produce aminochromes (indoles such as adrenochrome and dopachrome); one or two percent of people overproduce indoles until they hallucinate during episodes of schizophrenia. Believing that indole levels could be controlled, Hoffer tested medicinal doses of niacin and ascorbic acid (vitamins B-3 and C and discovered that vitamin therapy can restore normal brain function. Linus Pauling, a PhD chemist, called Hoffer's approach orthomolecular psychiatry – using optimum doses of nutrients to heal.

Dr. Hoffer wrote many books and journal articles to establish orthomolecular medicine as a complementary dimension of care. An appendix to *Adventures in Psychiatry: the Scientific Memoirs of Dr. Abram Hoffer* lists his publications: 30 books and hundreds of articles. Even before Dr. Hoffer's time, there were precedents for restorative care. Malnourished pellagra patients recovered from episodes of psychosis by taking niacin and tryptophan and improving their diets. (Ref. Dr. J. Goldberger.) Other patients, who went psychotic after infections of syphilis, recovered by taking penicillin. With pellagra patients re-nourished and syphilis patients getting penicillin, Dr. Hoffer researched schizophrenia, neurotransmitters and metabolism. After differentiating mental patients who had infections (such as syphilis or rabies) or medical problems (such as hypothyroidism or pellagra), Hoffer identified patients whose hallucinations and perceptual distortions had biochemical causes. In the 1950s, while researching schizophrenia in the province of Saskatchewan, Canada, Dr. Hoffer cooperated with colleagues to develop

restorative treatments. Dr. Hoffer published his findings in 600 medical journal articles. Years of Hoffer's editorials in the *Jnl. of Orthomolecular Medicine* share his views on psychiatry, research, progress and success treating schizophrenia and psychosis. (You can visit free archives of the JOM at www.orthomed.org)

The majority of conventional psychiatrists disputed, discounted and dismissed Hoffer's reports. Without studying Hoffer's double-blind placebo-controlled gold-standard research or reading Hoffer's books such as *Niacin Therapy in Psychiatry* (1962), *How to Live with Schizophrenia* (1966) and *Healing Schizophrenia* (2004), or studying his articles or editorials, most brain doctors assumed that vitamins could not help psychotic patients. Busy managing sick patients, 'modern' psychiatrists dissed Hoffer's biochemical hypotheses and ignored his claims of a 75% recovery rate for acute schizophrenia. Many psychiatrists decided that Hoffer's research could not justify regimens of nutritional supplements for psychosis but those doctors did not interview recovered orthomolecular patients, study Hoffer's reports carefully, read his books or consider complementing pills, talks and shocks with vitamins, minerals or amino acids. For decades, closed-minded psychiatrists ignored orthomolecular research and withheld vitamins from hundreds of thousands of sick patients. A few open-minded psychiatrists visited Dr. Hoffer, witnessed his work and learned how they could use orthomolecular regimens to help their patients, restoratively.

While Dr. Hoffer was using his old-school training to heal patients, then writing books and articles and networking with colleagues to educate the public about restorative care, most psychiatrists had little success treating schizophrenia and psychosis with talk therapies and managed care. Consider palliative care for cancer patients – terminal patients do not get well so doctors manage terminal cases with sedatives and pain pills. Tranquilizers and antipsychosis pills help most modern psychiatrists manage their patients. Here's the logic – when patients go psychotic, why not give them anti-symptom medications: antidepressants, anxiolytics, antipsychotics and anticonvulsants? Why dwell on side attacks, toxic effects or drug-induced neurological disorders? With pills and more pills available to squelch angst, numb pains, dumb brains and stimulate energy, doctors can manage high volumes of mental patients efficiently and keep them calm and quiet, safely distanced from normal people. Who would assess recovery rates and report on psychiatry?

Dr. Hoffer gives us a reality check. Today many mental patients get talk therapies without healing, shelter but no privacy, food but poor nutrition, and mind-numbing treatments with anti-symptom meds or electric shocks. Years ago when psychotic patients only got meds, talks or shocks, Dr. Hoffer saw few recoveries; if mental patients get those same treatments today, we see few recover. Year after year, from the 1950s to today, hundreds of thousands of mental patients consult psychiatrists and visit mental hospitals. The practice guidelines of psychiatry recommend: 1. mental status exams, 2. patient and family histories, 3. testing for medical problems and 4. differential diagnosing before 5. recommending safe and effective treatments. If psychiatrists are too busy to offer guideline-quality care, what can be done to antidote shortcuts and improve substandard care?

Abram Hoffer shows us by his example: from 1950 to today (2007), he researched neurotransmitter disorders, identified metabolic causes of psychosis and prescribed health-restoring doses of vital amines and other nutritional supplements. He developed the concept of restorative orthomolecular medicine as a complementary dimension of care. He networked and taught other doctors about orthomolecular care and smart nutrients. Thousands of psychotic patients, worldwide, recovered taking vitamins but even after decades of research, progress and success, orthomolecular medicine remains little-known.

In this book, Dr. Abram Hoffer (biochemist, physician and psychiatrist-retired) compares psychiatry yesterday (1950) with psychiatry today (2007). Today most patients get managed care, labels and pills, talks and shocks. Unfortunately, recovery rates remain low, little better than yesterday. Abram Hoffer outlines yesterday's problems with psychiatry, warns us about the dark side of psychiatry today and nourishes our hope for feeling better and living longer with restorative orthomolecular psychiatry.

Review by Robert Sealey, BSc, CA author of *90-Day Plan for Finding Quality Care* www.searpubl.ca

Most doctors don't pay any attention if patients over-eat junk food or self-medicate with alcohol, oblivious to the reality that brain cells need proper 'fuels.' Certain nutrients are essential. Psychiatrists don't usually bother with nutrition but Abram Hoffer went to the old school which taught doctors to assess root causes and contributing factors before making a differential diagnosis. As Hoffer evaluated biochemical and nutritional factors underlying psychosis, he discovered that foods and nutrients can affect mental health. Over his long and distinguished career, Dr. Hoffer fine-tuned patients' diets and prescribed regimens of vitamins, trace minerals, amino acids, antioxidants, energy and enzyme cofactors. These treatments healed many patients until they stopped hallucinating, rejoined their families and lived well.

Hoffer remained true to the principles of good science and the practices of good medicine. If only his colleagues in psychiatry had retained their care and concern for healing patients by consistently using the practice guidelines of their profession. But, modern psychiatry shifted darkly toward managing mental illness by giving sick people quick labels and offering palliative care-by-pills. Would a daily overload of patients sick with depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, psychosis, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, autism and anxiety mean that psychiatrists would have no choice but to shortcut their professional practice guidelines? The practice guidelines of psychiatry recommend a series of careful steps before psychiatrists make an accurate diagnosis which, of many possible causes or contributing factors, identifies the root of our brain sickness. Professionals who follow their guidelines know that they are encouraged to assign a differential diagnosis before they recommend relevant treatments which have been researched, tested and proven safe, effective and restorative for our particular problem. What if overloaded specialists have too many sick patients and not enough time to follow their guidelines? How could they manage by only using quick labels and easy prescriptions? Wouldn't the quality of care suffer? Of course, but after all, everybody knows that mental patients never get well anyway, so best to keep them quiet, keep them calm and keep them safely out of our minds. Who would notice if modern psychiatrists shortcut their practice guidelines?

What if our experts give us labels and assign us numbers from the hundreds of mental conditions which are categorized in their Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (D.S.M.)? Giving quick labels will be way faster than doing mental status exams, way faster than taking medical and mental patient and family histories, and way faster than doing medical and neurological tests (as recommended by the practice guidelines of psychiatry in order to discover the root cause(s) and contributing factor(s) and make a differential diagnosis). With a D.S.M. label, a psychiatrist need only prescribe one or more pills from their handy lists of antidepressants, antianxiety meds, antipsychotics, and anticonvulsants? How many patients recover and resume normal life after experts give quick labels and anti-symptom prescriptions? It turns out that fewer than 10% of schizophrenics recover that way.

According to Dr. Hoffer, in 1850, the Quakers, a religious group, developed what they called Moral Treatment for the Insane. They provided kindness, shelter, food and respect until 50% of their patients recovered and returned to their communities where they could work and live well. What went wrong since 1850? The herd of mental patients who trusted our lives to modern psychiatrists have learned a series of painful lessons. Not only do D.S.M. labels bear no relation to treatments, but the treatments with pills and more pills don't necessarily help us recover or resume normal life. Modern managed care has none of the success that the Quakers provided in the 1950s; modern psychiatry is about managing patients, sacrificing the quality of care in favor of efficiency. Isn't efficiency more important than healing mental defectives?

Students of the history of pharmacology can easily learn that chemical company manufacturers developed brain pills from left-over rocket fuels after World War II and have grown rich by modifying and marketing these powerful pills. Why not give rocket fuel-based chemicals to re-energize sick mental patients? Why not? Because prescribing rocket-fuel-based chemicals will cause many sick patients to suffer from adverse effects, toxic effects and drug-induced neurological disorders. Will anyone notice; will anyone care?

When Dr. Abram Hoffer started working as a young psychiatrist at mental hospitals in Saskatchewan, Canada, he was horrified by the sorry state of affairs; the warehousing of hundreds of sick, suffering and deteriorating patients. Nobody told Dr. Hoffer that there was no cure for psychosis, so he applied his PhD in biochemistry to research schizophrenia. Fortunately for his patients, Dr. Hoffer did not follow his herd of colleagues into the dark age of 'managed' psychiatry; Hoffer refused to label and drug sick patients into silence; he preferred to take the road less travelled and heal his patients so they could live well. Many of Hoffer's acute schizophrenia patients recovered by taking optimum doses of a methyl acceptor (B-3, niacin or niacinamide) with an antioxidant (C, ascorbic acid). For

more than 50 years, while researching and developing regimens of nutrients to heal psychosis and other mental disorders, Hoffer reported clinical progress and success by improving diets and giving medicinal doses of vitamins B-3, B-6, C, zinc and manganese. Thousands of patients recovered. Megavitamin therapeutics proved safe and effective.

Believing that thousands of patients and their trusting families could benefit from complementary vitamins and minerals, Abram Hoffer made the time to write more than 30 books and 600 medical journal articles and editorials. Hoffer's books include *The Chemical Basis of Clinical Psychiatry* (1960), *Niacin Therapy in Psychiatry* (1962), *How to Live with Schizophrenia* (1966), *The Hallucinogens* (1967), *Smart Nutrients* (1980) *Orthomolecular Medicine for Physicians* (1989), and *Adventures in Psychiatry* (2005) and *Orthomolecular Medicine for Everyone* (2008). For decades, he wrote about the biochemistry of schizophrenia, described the healing capabilities of vitamins and other nutrients, recommended healthy diets and introduced orthomolecular medicine to patients, families, caregivers and health professionals. Thanks to Abram Hoffer's prolific part-time authorship, anyone can read about his research, check his references, consider his careful observations and learn Hoffer's restorative treatment regimens.

As Hoffer studied his herd of mental patients, he discovered which ones had nutritional deficiencies and dependencies and which ones had disorders connected to their biochemical individuality. As appropriate to each individual's diagnosis and biochemical individuality, Hoffer healed with essential nutrients, starting with vitamin B-3, using either niacin or niacinamide. Hoffer researched, discovered, developed and taught orthomolecular principles. Decade after decade, Hoffer wrote so many detailed books, articles and editorials that any open-minded health professional could pierce the veil of darkness that shrouds modern psychiatry and learn how to heal chronic mental illnesses and maintain health by prescribing complementary regimens of vitamins A, B, C, D and E with trace minerals and other nutrients. Dr. Hoffer explains the *restorative* dimension of care: "The practice of orthomolecular medicine recognizes that diseases are due to a metabolic fault that is correctable in most patients by good nutrition, including the use of vitamins and mineral supplements."

As you read this fascinating book, you will learn how to restore health and live well by eating nutritious foods and asking health professionals to recommend nutritional supplements. Ortho-molecular medicine has helped thousands of patients, for decades. Optimum doses of essential nutrients tested safe and effective. You can help yourself recover, feel better and live longer; then tell your friends and families!

review by Robert Sealey, BSc

author of *Finding Care for Depression, Mental Episodes & Brain Disorders*

90-Day Plan for Finding Quality Care

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