

CRAIG NEWNES

What would you hope for if you have some kind of mental breakdown in your life? Some kind words from your GP perhaps, or some serious help with looking after the kids? Maybe, some counselling? At a pinch, if you are really stuck, how about a safe place to go for a few days? Most people want these things for themselves or their family but you won't see many of them in modern psychiatry. Most people get drugs, drugs and drugs, partly because doctors are too busy to offer much else, partly because they believe the drugs will work and partly because doctors are trained to think that people who are crazy have something wrong with their brains.

I work in a psychiatric system that can seem pretty crazy itself. People want help but are given something called a risk assessment. People want a short break from their responsibilities and find themselves in a psychiatric hospital for weeks. People want someone to talk to and get drugs, or even electro-convulsive therapy, a treatment banned in several countries. Some colleagues, mental health professionals and service users thought the system mad so we produced a book, ***This is Madness***. It was a MIND best-seller. ***This is Madness Too*** is now also out. The authors call for some pretty radical changes in psychiatry.

For a start we need to abandon medical ways of looking at distress. If you are depressed, it's not your head that's the problem, it's almost certainly something in your life, often something you don't feel you can change. Drugs certainly won't change it. The pharmaceutical industry is so strong now in influencing medical education and government policy that finding non-drug alternatives is a real problem. One psychiatrist, Duncan Double, has suggested that a lot of psychiatric training is actually provided by drug company reps so it shouldn't be surprising that doctors believe in drugs. Oddly enough, GPs rarely take pills and potions themselves. We think the public need to know more about drugs and the reasons they are prescribed so the book calls for informed consent and advocacy in psychiatry. We want psychiatry to come clean about its conflicting roles in society. Sometimes the psychiatric system is there to offer therapy and help. At other times it is there to protect society or make anxious relatives feel better by treating members of the family they are worried about but don't want treatment.

One of the authors, Steve Baldwin, was killed in the Selby train crash. He was on his way to publicly debate with a psychiatrist the way in which children are treated by the mental health system. Steve's chapter is about the need to tell parents the truth about the dangerous drugs that are given to treat ADHD. A leading US psychiatrist, Peter Breggin, also writes for us about ADHD. His chapter is about the way the diagnosis is a fake and the drugs work, not by treating some kind of psychiatric brain condition, but in the same way that any amphetamines would if you took them all the time.

There are several ex-patients and local authors writing chapters. Olive Bucknall describes her family's experiences of Shelton Hospital in

Shrewsbury. Biza Stenfert Kroese from Birmingham University writes about the ways we treat people with learning disabilities. Vivien Lindow, a psychiatric survivor from Bristol, suggests a move towards research controlled and directed by service users and survivors themselves. Peter Lehmann's chapter on withdrawal from medication is one of the first articles published in English to give advice about how to come off some of the most powerful psychiatric drugs. This advice is hard to get in the NHS.

Jan Wallcraft and John Michaelson talk about the need to change the language of psychiatry. The service user/survivor movement is returning to old language - breakdown, madness, crisis, recovery - language that brings fresh ways of thinking to the area of mental health, language that does not emphasise 'otherness', language which holds out hope. We should start by chucking out medical labels. Some of these are simply made up on the spot. So-called Severe and Dangerous Personality Disorder wasn't even made up by a psychiatrist. A civil servant invented it last year as a way of describing people we are scared of and don't know what to do with.

It may seem odd but it can be scary to produce a book like this. The professional world of psychiatry is very sensitive to criticism. One of our contributors, David Healy, a psychiatrist from North Wales, hit the press in July because he believed that a drug company had been influential in denying him a job. David's work is on the links between anti-depressants and suicide.

The book is a mixture of common sense and suggestions that some people may see as radical, or even crazy. We believe that the national lottery could allocate funds to projects like service survivor run crisis houses. We would like mental health professionals to simply ask people what they need in order to recover and then help them get it. When researching the effectiveness of treatments, we could start by asking people where they want to be and later asking them if they got there. This research would be user led.

Advocacy would be freely available and mental health professionals would support advocacy schemes while respecting their independence. Drug company sponsorship of journals, conferences and other media should be banned. The vested interests of funding bodies ought to be more explicitly stated in the published papers of psychiatric researchers. The best kinds of counselling and psychotherapy would be recognised as those placing the individual in a cultural context rather than those implying a quick-fix of the internal worlds of deranged individuals. Service users would be respected and properly paid for their expertise on planning committees and in case conferences, and for the work that they do in helping others. Complete madness? You bet.

Read the [Psychotherapy Manifesto](#) from *This is Madness Too*

This is Madness Too: Critical Perspectives on Mental Health Services is edited by Craig Newnes, Guy Holmes and Cailzie Dunn and published by PCCS Books of Ross-on-Wye at £14.00.