

The Urgent Necessity for More Non-Drug Alternatives in Mental Health Care

We are alarmed about the over-reliance on psychiatric medication in mental health care because of the undue influence of the pharmaceutical industry. We see an urgent need for a far greater range of non-pharmaceutical mental health care.

We are participants in the USA Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) meeting, “Past, Present, and Future: SAMHSA Efforts to Promote Consumer/Survivor Inclusion.” We are speaking today only for ourselves as individuals, and not for SAMHSA. We applaud SAMHSA's endorsement of the values of peer support, social justice, self-determination, trauma-informed care, and a dignified life in the community for everyone.

As leaders in the mental health consumer and psychiatric survivor movement, we affirm the principle of choice in mental health care, and continue to work towards the elimination of coercion in all mental health treatment. We support the right of those who willingly choose to take prescribed psychiatric medications.

However, the inappropriate prescriptions of psychiatric medication are harming a wide range of the USA population, including infants, vets, people of color and seniors. Severe side effects are contributing to heartbreaking suffering and approximately 25 years of premature mortality for people in the public mental health system. Advertisements, the media and far too many mental health organizations are disseminating misleading information about psychiatric medication. Some individuals are even involuntarily administered psychiatric drugs over their expressed wishes, including on an outpatient basis.

Our constituency's right to choice, empowerment and self-determination in mental health care is threatened as never before, in the USA and internationally. We call upon SAMHSA to work with their federal partners and consumer/survivors to:

- Address the conflict of interest in the current relationship between the federal government and the pharmaceutical industry.
- End direct-to-consumer advertising for psychiatric medications.
- Complete the President's New Freedom Commission recommendation to investigate the long-term effects of psychiatric medication.
- Independently research the efficacy, safety and successful ways of reducing psychiatric medications.
- Research and fund non-drug alternatives such as mental health peer-run respite centers and recovery-oriented education.

We encourage all those concerned to speak out about this crisis.

Signed:

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