
LETTERS

Scientists unfairly attack Prozac

The June 1 letter on Prozac by Doug Johnston is another example of the campaign of misinformation that Scientologists are spreading on Prozac and other treatments prescribed by psychiatrists.

Johnston refers to research carried out by L. Ron Hubbard, the founder of Scientology. Hubbard initiated his "research" with the premises that all psychiatric treatment is damaging to all patients and that psychological problems can be dealt with only by training the mind to forget, using a form of self-hypnosis. He conveniently ignored all evidence that refuted these premises. When the mental-health community rejected his far-out ideas, he developed a profound and obsessive hatred for psychiatrists, who, he declared, were "chosen as a vehicle to undermine and destroy the West."

Hubbard's "research" resulted in the use of devices like the "E-meter" referred to in Johnston's letter. Scientologists' central belief is that humans have a soul-like entity called the "thetan" that is perfect and travels from galaxy to galaxy. To help their thetans rid themselves of "engrams," which are essentially bad memories, they use the E-meter, a device similar to a lie detector, often at a cost of

hundreds of dollars per session. The medical profession considers the use of this device quackery.

For this and other questionable practices, the IRS has revoked the tax-exempt status of the Church of Scientology in California (the mother church), classifying it as a business. The Citizens Commission on Human Rights, a Scientology-founded group, has been responsible for unwarranted attacks on many therapeutics used in treatment of mental abnormalities. Dennis Erlich, a former Scientologist minister, stated, "Psychiatrists are in their way. Scientology is a serious conspiracy to derail psychiatry, pharmaceutical companies, and so on." This commission uses any means to attack a target. The basic tactic of this group is to send press releases containing false statements detrimental to Prozac and other psychiatric drugs to newspapers, radio and TV stations that, without checking sources, print or broadcast the information.

Extensive clinical trial data collected by competent clinical psychiatrists on thousands of patients diagnosed as severely depressed show conclusively that suicidal ten-

dencies were significantly reduced in patients who received Prozac.

One of the tragic known consequences of the misinformation being spread by this group occurred at the Oakville-Trafalgar Memorial Hospital in Toronto. Twenty-one severely depressed patients were watching commission president Dennis Clarke on the Phil Donahue show. Some of these patients had been hospitalized after they had attempted to slit their wrists (they had not received Prozac prior to being hospitalized). After they were hospitalized, some of them received Prozac.

When Clarke described Joseph Wesbecker as a person who had been considered a gentle, nonargumentative man turned killer by Prozac (he killed eight co-workers, wounded 12 and then shot himself), many of the patients became hysterically distraught. It took three days for the hospital staff to calm them down. Similar incidents indicate that the scurrilous attacks are causing some patients to reject treatment, causing regression into severe depression.

And Johnston wonders why Andrea Brunais criticizes the tactics of his group?

R.F. SHUMARD, Ph.D.
Sarasota

