THE TRYING TIMES NEWS

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PSYCHIATRY: THE SEINFELD OF MEDICINE

A Show About Nothing with a Surprisingly Lucrative Prescription Plan

Psychiatry may be the only branch of medicine named after something it doesn't believe exists. The word means roughly *"doctoring the soul."*

Excellent.

A FEW QUESTIONS FOR PSYCHIATRY

Let's see, the soul -
"We don't recognize the soul as a scientifically measurable medical entity."
Okay.
What do you treat?
"The brain."
Fantastic. An organ.
You test it?
"No."
Well, crap.
What do you test?
"Mostly we ask how you've been feeling."

And there it is. Psychiatry: The Seinfeld of Medicine. A medical show about nothing you can actually point to. The suffering is real. The patient is real. The prescription is definitely real.

It's that little part in the middle where somebody asks: "What exactly is medically wrong with me?" That gets a little fuzzy.

THE BOOK

Depression? Blood test: no.

ADHD? Diagnostic brain scan: no.

Bipolar disorder? Definitive biomarker: no.

So how do we know which disorder you have?
"There's a book."

Ah! A medical reference book containing the laboratory findings?

"*No. A book containing the diagnoses.*"

How did the diagnoses get in the book?

"Committees decided."

Of course they did.

President. Mayor. Prom queen. Major Depressive Disorder.

Democracy has really expanded its services.

CHEMICAL IMBALANCE

And for decades we even had an explanation. ***Chemical imbalance***. Now we're talking. Chemicals can be measured.

SO, WE ASKED PSYCHIATRY

Did you measure them?
"No."
Did psychiatry study the chemistry?
"No."
Did anybody?
"Eventually."
When?
"Well... the bigger picture started coming together around 2014."
What chemistry are we talking about? Estrogen. Progesterone. Testosterone. Cortisol. And several other chemicals that help regulate what happens throughout your body.
You mean the sex hormones? Yeah. Turns out they're chemistry.
Well, crap.
Wait -

You mean the chemistry of attraction might actually be chemistry?
Well, crap.
All this time we thought that was witchcraft. Turns out the people telling us it was witchcraft were the ones doing the witchcraft.
So you didn't understand the chemistry? And you didn't test the chemistry? But you told us that we had a chemical imbalance anyway so you could sell us some chemicals almost guaranteed to mess with our natural chemicals?
Well, yes….
and if that creates another problem?
Well, now we have you for life!

WHAT AN EXTRAORDINARILY PROFITABLE WAY *NOT* TO UNDERSTAND CHEMISTRY.

THE BODY REFUSES TO STAY IN ITS DEPARTMENT

Then medicine discovered something inconvenient. The human body contains actual chemicals. Lots of them.

Estrogen. Progesterone. Testosterone. Cortisol. Thyroid hormones. Neurotransmitters. Immune signals. Stress chemistry.

All running around talking to each other like nobody bothered to read the hospital organizational chart. Turns out the doctors who actually specialize in the physical brain are called neurologists. Psychiatry got the questionnaire.

In fact, the heart talks to the brain. The ovaries coordinate with the brain. The testes coordinate with the brain. The thyroid has apparently been wandering through everybody's department unsupervised. The nervous system is involved in damn near everything. And cortisol has a building pass.

THE HUMAN BODY HAS ABSOLUTELY NO RESPECT FOR MEDICAL SPECIALTIES.

It's a whole interrelated system, and treating one part can affect the other parts, but uh… does your heart doctor coordinate with your gynecologist?

1993

By the early 1990s, the federal government finally had to push women's inclusion in clinical research.

1993

We walked on the moon. We had the Hubble Space Telescope. We had personal computers. We had Jurassic Park. We believed in the force!

And medicine had just reached: "Has anybody tried this crap on Linda?"

You can get the facts at the Broadside News. We're trying to keep a straight face here.

Over time this became especially awkward with women. For decades, women were excluded or badly underrepresented in medical research because their chemistry was considered too complex.

By men.

Irony much?

Hmmmm, women were too hormonally complicated to study. Just not too complicated to medicate. Thank God somebody found a workaround.

But wait, if they didn't study anything, how do they know what drugs women need?

A FAIRLY OBVIOUS QUESTION FOR PSYCHIATRY
Can we test this drug on women?
"No. Their hormones will interfere with the results."
Can we prescribe it to them?
"Absolutely."

Well, problem solved.

SIGMUND FREUD HAD A NEPHEW IN MARKETING

Which brings us to Sigmund Freud. Freud had theories. Freud had a couch. Freud had no modern neuroscience, hormone mapping, brain imaging, or laboratory confirmation for his grand theories of why everybody was doing whatever the hell everybody was doing.

But Freud had something even better; *a nephew in marketing*.

Edward Bernays - you know the one, he's often called the father of ***Public Relations.*** He famously helped sell cigarettes to women as "Torches of Freedom."

Product: cigarette. Feature: smoke. Campaign: LIBERATION.

Huh. An addiction, liberating? That isn't advertising. That's witchcraft with letterhead.

And there's actually a name for the bigger idea behind this kind of thing: ***manufacturing consent***. It isn't about getting people to agree with the truth; it's about conditioning them to accept an idea without ever realizing someone decided it for them.

Basically, don't sell Linda cigarettes. Sell Linda the idea that she was apparently waiting her whole life to smoke one.

Bernays understood that the window dressing could sell what wasn't actually in the store. Psychiatry had some spectacular window dressing.

White coat? Check. Prescription pad? Check. Hospital department? Check. Official-sounding terminology? Check.

Objective medical test confirming the diagnosis?

Well, crap. Apparently, nobody checked for that.

L. RON HUBBARD HAD THE WRONG COUCH

And then there's L. Ron Hubbard. Oh, come on. We have to. Hubbard showed up in 1950 with Dianetics, a couch, and a whole lot of new ideas. But no nephew.

Already we're seeing the problem.

Believe it or not, Hubbard initially tried to bring those ideas to the medical and psychiatric establishment. He thought he'd figured out something important about how psychological experience could affect the body, and he tried to share it.

That went well.

Apparently, his couch had the wrong address, nobody was wearing a white coat, and he'd completely neglected bringing a prescription pad.

Rookie mistake.

Hubbard and psychiatry became mortal enemies. And then science did something terribly inconsiderate. It kept going.

Decades later, researchers began documenting something Hubbard had been talking about back in 1950: **What happens to you psychologically can become biology**.

Trauma and chronic stress can leave measurable changes across the brain, nervous system, hormones, immune system—even the way some genes are expressed.

Well, crap.

The science-fiction writer got some science.

HOLLYWOOD HAS COMEDY WRITERS. WE HAVE PSYCHIATRY.

Meanwhile, Psychiatry still had a clipboard.

AND A PRESCRIPTION PAD.

It's pure fiction, we'd say. Gee. Wonder what medicine might look like today if they'd listened to him in 1950 instead of spending decades fighting him?

Anyway...

MORAL TREATMENT

Psychiatry actually had a pretty decent opening act. In the late 1700s, Philippe Pinel became famous for getting psychiatric patients out of chains and treating them like human beings.

Revolutionary idea: Maybe talk to them.

And it worked well enough to help launch what became known as "moral treatment."

Moral treatment.

Remember that. It's about to become hilarious. Because psychiatry then spent the next century or so apparently trying to see just how far it could get from the original instructions.

Forced sterilization. Lobotomies. Electroshock. Eugenics. MKUltra.

Yes, Bob. We know. The CIA did weird crap. You may return to Thanksgiving dinner now.

So, let's review: Philippe Pinel takes the chains off people and helps launch moral treatment. Psychiatry takes it from there and becomes remarkably proficient at torture.

Apparently, the problem with the chains wasn't the torture. They were just old technology. Moral treatment to modern torture techniques.

That is one hell of a rebrand.

Philippe may need a pill...

NAMING RIGHTS

Psychiatry did accomplish something remarkable. It got naming rights.

Think about the symptoms we learned to associate with mental illness: Sleep problems. Memory problems. Trouble concentrating. Changes in mood, motivation, appetite, and energy.

Even neurological symptoms—physical problems involving the nervous system, not some imaginary little "mental" compartment floating around separately from the body.

For decades, psychiatry put names around combinations of these symptoms, grouped them into disorders, and taught us to recognize the pattern as psychiatric. And eventually, we forgot the symptoms were just symptoms.

Nice trick.

Finally, psychiatry had something. Then it made it disappear.

A show about nothing takes commitment.

Because while psychiatry was naming the symptoms, the rest of medicine was studying the body. And it kept finding physical explanations for things we'd learned to call psychiatric.

PSYCHIATRY GOT THE VOCABULARY. MEDICINE FOUND THE PHYSIOLOGY.

Apparently, the symptoms weren't psychiatric. They were symptoms, you know, of an actual body problem.

Well, that's inconvenient.

ONE TEENSY LITTLE QUESTION

It raises one teensy little question. Psychiatry couldn't give you a blood test showing what was wrong. Couldn't give you a scan confirming the diagnosis. Couldn't point to a biological measurement and say: There it is. But it could prescribe a drug to correct it.

Huh.

So where exactly did the data come from that told them what drug fixed what they couldn't measure?

Anyway,

Something to ponder.

Meanwhile, somebody is laughing all the way to the bank with our hard-earned money. But there is no science here.

It's fiction - not science fiction even, just pure fiction. Can you believe that crap?

PSYCHIATRY: THE SEINFELD OF MEDICINE
A SHOW ABOUT NOTHING.
NO BLOOD TEST. NO DIAGNOSTIC SCAN. NO DEFINITIVE BIOMARKER.
BUT IF YOU'VE GOT THE MONEY, HONEY, THEY'VE GOT THE PRESCRIPTION.

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