



Medicating Schizophrenia: A History

Sheldon Gelman

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Schizophrenia has been and still is one of the most misunderstood and difficult-to-treat mental illnesses. Prior to the creation of antipsychotic medications in the 1950s, the only available treatments were frequently dangerous, and of questionable efficacy.

By the 1960s, new medications had virtually replaced the old therapies, creating a revolution in the treatment of mental illness. It was thought that people with schizophrenia would be able to live independently in their communities, returning to hospitals only briefly to have a medication regimen adjusted or reinstated. This period of hope did not last as patients began to experience disturbing side effects and the medications were found to be less effective than originally thought. What led doctors to embrace the new drug treatments so quickly? Did a rush to de-institutionalization give doctors, patients, and the general public false and dangerous hopes? Could this happen today?

Sheldon Gelman looks at the manner in which psychiatrists have evaluated, interpreted, and prescribed antipsychotic drugs since their inception from the 1950s to the present. Gelman argues that hospitals were being emptied not because patients were "cured", but rather because of the changing ways society came to view disease, drugs, and scientific remedies. As we approach the fiftieth anniversary of the discovery of antipsychotic drugs, Gelman's book provides a provocative, timely examination of how and why medical treatments evolve.

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