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Mission Impossible: Curing my Mental Illnesses

Olivia Weiland

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ALTHOUGH general anxiety disorder and major depressive disorder are two of the most common mental illnesses and have been recognized in the medical field for decades, they lack a cure. Mental illnesses, although sometimes treatable, are incurable because they are hard to treat, have no funding for research, which healthcare providers believe isn't necessary. However, many individuals with mental illnesses feel plagued by them and would like to be "set free" by a cure.

"Mental illnesses are very complex and hard to treat, making it impossible to find a cure. For example, there is a form of depression called "treatment-resistant depression" which, as the name implies, is resistant to any form of treatment. Even "normal" forms of depression can be hard to treat, or difficult to narrow down symptoms:

Most patients with depression present with comorbid somatic symptoms or anxiety, often reaching a severity akin to that of an anxiety disorder or a somatoform disorder. A recent study of patients with major depressive disorder has illustrated that these symptom clusters (pain, anxiety, and depression) are important in patients' assessment of improvement."

(Demyttenaere et al. 2011)

In my personal struggle with depression, it took years to find a treatment that works, and that could change. When I first went to my doctor with my symptoms, she recommended me to a therapist.

Personally, therapy didn't work for me, so I left. I was still having my symptoms, however, and they were worsening. I returned to my doctor, this time to be recommended to see a psychiatrist. I saw the psychiatrist for over six months before being officially diagnosed with a severe form of major depressive disorder and continued to see her while being prescribed Prozac, an antidepressant. I was on that for almost four years before switching to a different prescription, a generic version of Lexapro, which would also target my anxiety and OCD symptoms which developed my first year of college. I have since been on Lexapro for four months now and love it, but I know it won't always work for me. Especially as I grow and my brain matures, I will probably have to continue trying different prescriptions until I am 25, when the average brain has matured.

There isn't much funding into the research for new drugs for anxiety and depression. Research is focused on more efficient and effective treatments instead of cures, claims Nutt et al. (2007),

"Research over the past 20 years has primarily focused on the role of serotonin (5-HT) in the pathophysiology and treatment of [clinical depression]. However, since the 1960s it has been recognized that norepinephrine (NE) and dopamine (DA) also play an integral part in the underlying pathophysiology of [clinical depression], as well as a central role in the neurophysiology of a number of highly prevalent, chronic and debilitating symptoms of depression."

There are many components that go into making a cure, but it's difficult to create a cure if there are still ineffective treatment methods. Personally, it took years to find an effective treatment method for me, and it will probably continue

changing throughout my life.

Most healthcare professionals believe that current treatment methods are enough. As Nutt et al. (2007) states, "Focusing treatment on the predominant or driving symptomatology for an individual patient with major depression could potentially improve rates of response and remission." Healthcare companies think only treatment is necessary, and it isn't worth it to find a cure. This mainly applies to the United States, as healthcare is privatized and not as regulated as other countries. With the current high costs of basic treatment, a cure would likely be unimaginably expensive.

Some people believe that mental illnesses aren't as serious as other illnesses; they aren't worth the time, energy, money, or resources to find a cure. As said by Insel and Scolnick (2006),

"[m]ental disorders cause more disability than any other class of medical illness in Americans between ages 15 and 44 years. The suicide rate is higher than the annual mortality from homicide, AIDS, and most forms of cancer. In contrast to nearly all communicable and most non-communicable diseases, there is little evidence that the morbidity and mortality from mental disorders have changed in the past several decades. Mental health advocates, including psychiatric researchers, have pointed to stigma as one of the reasons for the lack of progress with mental illnesses relative to other medical illnesses."

This proves how severe mental illnesses can be, and how they can even cause the end of a life like other illnesses. I won't compare mental illnesses to other illnesses and ailments as it is not my place, but mental illnesses still need to be taken seriously and can be without making comparisons. They cause deaths and the general suffering of many individuals. Therefore, mental illnesses deserve a cure. We must put funding into research and spread awareness about mental

illnesses.

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