

A Review of 'Adventures in Psychiatry: The Scientific Memoirs of Dr. Abram Hoffer', by Dr. Abram Hoffer

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Adventures in Psychiatry: The Scientific Memoirs of Dr. Abram Hoffer, by Dr. Abram Hoffer. Kos Publishing Inc. 2005. ISBN 0-9731945-6-1. Can.\$ 30. At bookstores or from the publisher by fax 519-927-9542, phone 519-927-1049, or from www.kospublishing.com - go to info@kospublishing.com. Bulk order discount 50% starts at more than 5 copies; shipping charges added.

Dr. Abram Hoffer's life could justly be described as being an essential nutrient in its own right. Such research, being based on the right questions, correct observations, and relevant assumptions, functions like a vitamin, mineral, or essential fatty acid for the growth of medical knowledge. This is so because such research sustains and nourishes every branch of inquiry it comes in contact with.

This book is a feast for the mind and the spirit. For those of us who have learned, through painful personal experience that drugs, surgery, and most of high-tech medicine offer only very temporary benefits, but rarely if ever a cure, this book tells the wonderful story of the rebirth of nutritional medicine. Here the reader gets a magisterial overview of the resurrection of nutritional medicine in the 20th century and its placement on new foundations of rigorous scientific methodology made possible by the simultaneous developments in biochemistry.

Over the past 60 years, Abram Hoffer's life's work has systematically transformed and informed major areas of modern medicine to the benefit of thousands of patients. And now we have a book in which he tells the story of a lifetime in research and clinical practice himself. Today, what is known about addiction, depression, schizophrenia, attention deficit disorders, the nutritional role in cancer prevention and treatment, the connection between stress and mental health, the nutritional deficiencies acting in synergy with vaccine toxicity in autism and the nutritional regimes to reverse this condition, as well as the nutritional treatment of cardiovascular/lipid disorders was either pioneered by Dr. Hoffer or co-developed alongside other giants in those fields, such as two-time Nobel laureate Linus

Pauling (who coined the term orthomolecular medicine), Theron Randolph (the father of environmental medicine), Humphrey Osmond, Roger Williams (discoverer of Pantothenic acid and other B vitamins), Irwin Stone (vitamin C pioneer), Bernard Rimland (autism research pioneer) and many others.

This book will enthrall those practicing naturopathy, pediatrics, environmental medicine, and addiction medicine. Medical historians will be fascinated. Patients looking for the basic science involved in the use of nutrition as prevention and treatment of mental disease will find it explained and contextualized for lay readers to get a better understanding of the block-headedness of much mainstream medicine. This book also has a virtually complete bibliography of Dr. Hoffer's writings. Given that this octogenarian is currently working on 4 books, it is of course impossible to be completely up to date.

"Adventures in Psychiatry" is dedicated to Tommy Douglas who was Premier of Saskatchewan when Dr. Hoffer was professor of psychiatry in Regina. Douglas energetically supported Dr. Hoffer's efforts to humanize the appalling conditions in the mental asylums of that time and encouraged the research begun into the nutritional deficiency connections to mental disease. The unique tongue-in-cheek humour and coolly factual narrative style of Dr. Hoffer's writing makes reading this book a pure delight.

We follow the author from his Saskatchewan farm childhood, subsequent training in bio-chemistry and agricultural science, his early insights into the central importance of soil and plant food quality to human and animal health, to his specialization in psychiatry, profes-

sorship at the University of Saskatchewan, and above all his daily work with patients. We learn of his disillusionment with traditional methods of treating the mentally ill (e.g. lobotomies), and we share his excitement of discovery as we follow his dramatic case histories, which unfold like detective-stories, as he uncovers the connection between deficiencies in specific nutrients and mental illness. One example is that of the first patient successfully rescued in the early 1950's from end-stage catatonic schizophrenia through vitamin therapy:

"Ken ... lay on his bed unresponsive, not able to eat or drink. Catatonic deaths [among schizophrenic patients] were not uncommon many years ago. We decided to make him the first patient to receive massive doses of the two vitamins ... niacin and vitamin C. We were certain we could not do Ken any harm since he was so close to death. We inserted a tube into his stomach since he could not swallow. Then we poured in a mixture of five grams of nicotinic acid and 2.5 grams of ascorbic acid. We waited anxiously by his bedside he seemed to grow no worse as this regimen was continued. On the second day he was able to sit up and drink his solution of vitamins. One month later he was completely normal!"

Thus, Hoffer's work began to offer patients recovery, not merely death-watch maintenance-therapies. Long-time colleague Linus Pauling observed that "Dr. Hoffer has made an important contribution to the health of human beings and the decrease of their suffering through the study of the effects of large doses of vitamin C and other nutrients."

Most gratifyingly, we read how Dr. Hoffer patiently handled the insufferable stupidity and arrogance of medical authorities in government and at universities, often hell-bent on preserving their pride and the status quo rather than focus on the suffering of patients. You will laugh and weep reading this book and regain faith in both medicine and humanity. Harold D. Foster, who teaches medical geography at the University of Victoria in BC, noted about this book that Dr. Hoffer's work with vitamins served to "undermine the reigning medical paradigms for psychiatry and cardiovascular disease. Fathering a new paradigm does not promote popularity. Fortunately, Dr Hoffer has consistently proven to be able to stand up for the truth, regardless of personal cost. Look around you, there are health food stores everywhere - now and thank Abram Hoffer for his courage." Indeed, the first vitamin B tablets were made at the suggestion of Dr. Hoffer, back in the early 1950's, by a compounding pharmacist. Since 1986 the Ben Gurion University in Israel has an Abram Hoffer Chair for orthomolecular medicine, and the most prestigious universities in the world conduct research into the role of nutrition in the causation and treatment of mental and chronic disease.

Some years ago, during an interview, Dr. Hoffer observed, "My idea of a typical meal toxic to the mind is a donut and coffee." He was referring to the refined flour and sugar concoctions and the pesticide-laden coffee with antibiotic and hormone-laced cream ingested by millions every day. Such observations are no longer dismissed but have become the stuff of major research and political action. As I was writing this review, two scientific reports reached me by e-mail from the UK: one is a large report published this month by Sustain, the British Alliance for Better Food and Farming, entitled *Changing Diets, Changing Minds: How Food Affects Mental Wellbeing and Behaviour*; the other is called *Feeding Minds* and published simultaneously by the British Mental Health Foundation (both available through www.sustainweb.org). The scientific and clinical foundations for these amazing reports, as their bibliographies show, were laid by Dr. Hoffer.

The March 28, 2006 issue of the Canadian Medical Association Journal ran a landmark article entitled "Intravenously Administered Vitamin C as Cancer Therapy: Three Cases" conducted by McGill University and the US National Institutes of Health; it was co-authored by Dr. Hoffer's son, Dr. John Hoffer of McGill University's department of medicine; he is successfully widening the scope of Dr. Hoffer's influence on medicine into mainstream clinical applications.

In his closing reflections Dr. Hoffer writes that "if research is to have any value at all it must explore outside what is currently known." He muses also about the fact that advice from enemies and friends presents a major challenge to those who think outside the box. The enemies are easy to identify and their advice is easily dismissed, Dr. Hoffer writes, but the advice of friends is harder to deal with: "The most common bad advice I received from friends was not to continue what we were doing because it made us unpopular. It took me some thought an effort to reject this advice; I feel vindicated in this decision as I see that I have been very popular with my patients ... for the past 50 years."

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