Diagnostic Inflation: Its Extent, Causes, Consequences, And Possible Cures

Allen Frances MD
Diagnostic Inflation Out Of Control

- US: 20% in last year; 50% lifetime
- Europe: 43% lifetime
- New Zealand: by age 32
  - Anxiety disorder- 50%
  - Mood disorder- 40%
  - Substance dependence- 40%
- New US study: an amazing 83% of kids meet a DSM IV diagnosis by age 21
Faddish Diagnosis Results In Four False 'Epidemics' During The Past Fifteen Years
Childhood Bipolar Disorder

- 40 fold increase
- Pushed by aggressive drug company marketing to MD's
- Direct to parent advertising
Autistic Disorder- 20 Fold Increase Caused By

• DSM IV inclusion of Aspergers

• Too tight a linkage of the diagnosis to the eligibility for school services

• Consumer advocacy

• it has become fashionable to be 'Aspie'
Attention Deficit Disorder - 3 fold Increase

- New on-patent drugs
- Direct-to-parent/teacher advertising
- Too tight a link to school services
- Fuzzy boundary with normality
- Developmental issues - being born in Dec is a risk factor (especially in boys) because they are more immature when start school

- large class sizes

- over-worked parents
Adult Bipolar Disorder-2 fold increase

- DSM IV added Bipolar II
- Fuzzy boundary with unipolar
- Thought leaders promote
- Heavy drug company marketing
DSM 5 Will Cause Hyper-inflation By Turning

- Normal grief and loss into MDD
- Anxiety into GAD
- Anxiety and sadness into MAD
- Temper tantrums into DMDD
- Binge eating into BED
- Forgetfulness of old age – MNCD
- Teenage eccentricities- APS
Is Anybody Sane Here

- Border with normality fuzzy and populous
- Small changes create millions of patients
- DSM 5 will medicalize the stresses, worries and disappointments of everyday life.
- The pool of normal becomes small puddle
- Creates impression we live in a sick society
Diagnostic Inflation Has Many Causes And So Will Require Many Cures
Causes Inherent To DSM Diagnosis

- Subjective judgment- no biological tests
- Too many categories-a splitter's system
- Thresholds are set too low
No bright line to demarcate the fuzzy and populous boundary with normality

Expert driven- worry re missed cases

Narrow focus-no concern re containing costs, proper allocations, or promoting overall public health
Disease Mongering By Drug Companies

- Market the 'ill' to sell the pill
- Life problems are "chemical imbalance"
- $$ to MD's and professional associations
- Thought leaders as mouthpieces
And More Disease Mongering

- Target primary care - where the $$'s are
- Promote off-label uses - especially for kids
- Promote long-term use
- Promote polypharmacy
- Side-effects are confused with symptoms leading to prescribing cascades
And More Disease Mongering

- Direct to consumer advertising
- Disease awareness campaigns
- Self-diagnosis check-lists
- Inordinate power over government
- Exaggerating the rates, severity and cost of mental disorders
Huge Profits From Psychotropics

- Antipsychotics - fourth highest revenue among all drug classes - $16 billion
- Antidepressants - fifth at $11 billion
- Antianxiety - eighth
Provide enormous resources and incentives for aggressive and misleading marketing
Big Fines Are Just A Cost Of Doing Business

- Lilly- $1.5 billion
- AstraZeneca- $500 million
- Pfizer- $500 million
- Jansen- $160 million
Prime Target- Primary Care MDs

- Prescribe 80% of psychotropic drugs
- Little training or interest in psychiatry
- Little time to evaluate symptoms/hx
 воползлись в пользу таблеток

- Индустрия легко влияет на производителей лекарств, лидеров и пациентов

- Распространяют бесплатные образцы
Over-diagnosis Caused By Consumer Groups

- Tend to widen boundaries of their illness
- Attract people who don't have a diagnosis
- Gain power in numbers
- Reduced stigma in numbers
- Receive drug company funding
- Are powerful lobbyists - more credible than drug companies but often pursue same goals
Over-diagnosis Caused By DSM

Linkage To:

- Insurance reimbursement
- Disability payments (often 'mental disorder' increases with unemployment)
- Eligibility for school services
Over-diagnosis Due to Bias in Epidemiology

- Methodological limitations due to cost
- Lay interviewers tap self report
- No filter for clinical significance of distress or impairment
- Can only provide an upper limit for rates of disorder - not true rates
- But presented as true rates
Over-diagnosis Caused By Media/Internet

- Popularize mental disorders
- Celebrity exemplars
- Contagion effects
- Attraction of joining support groups
- Self-diagnosis check-lists
Social Trends

- Psychiatric disability a convenient way to explain the lack of jobs or added job stress
- Perfectionism: falling short = mental illness
- Intolerance for individual difference
- Intolerance for developmental lags
- Intolerance for eccentricity
Overdiagnosis/Misuse In The Legal System

- Using psychiatric commitment to allow preventive detention of sexual predators
- Dx to reduce criminal responsibility
- Dx to explain 'mad' political acts - the Unabomber and Norwegian Terrorist
- Dx to increase damages in civil cases
Consequences of Overdiagnosis - Excessive Prescription of Potentially Harmful Drugs

- Antidepressants - 11% of adults
- Stimulant drugs - 4% of kids
- Huge increases in antipsychotic use in children and the elderly
- Complications: diabetes, obesity, heart disease, reduced life expectancy.
- Mindless and dangerous polypharmacy
Prescription Drugs Now Rival Street Drugs

- Emergency room visits
- Overdoses
- Accidental deaths
- Drug diversion - illegal stimulant use in 30% of college and 10% high school kids
Other Consequences of Diagnostic Inflation

- Increased costs for unnecessary drugs and psychiatric treatment
- Costs for treating complications - e.g., obesity, overdoses
- Increased cost of disability payments
- Lost work productivity
- Misallocation of mental health, school, and other services
Terrible Paradox Of Misallocated Resources

- Under-diagnosis of severe disorders
- Only 1/3 severe depressed see MH prof
- People who need help often don't get it
- Efficacy proven only for mod/severely ill
Over-diagnosis of questionable disorders

- People who don't need help often get it
- High placebo response rate for mild/mod
- Unnecessary costs and side effects
And More Unfortunate Consequences

- Stigma
- Reduced expectations and ambitions
- Loss of personal responsibility
- Creating 'sick' rather than resilient individuals and a 'sick' society
- Forensic misuse and medicalization of criminality
Take Home Messages

- Psychiatric treatment is very effective when targeted for proper indications.
- Diagnosis can cause more harm than good when not really needed.
- Diagnosis and treatment are spread too thin and applied in the wrong places.
Cures - Professional Steps

- Tightening the diagnostic system
- Encourage stepped diagnosis
- Focus on continuity of care and disorders with proven response to treatment

ards
• Evidenced based practice guidelines
• CME and medical school training to counteract drug company marketing
• Increase awareness of ethical standards
Eliminate industry-funded 'education'.

Eliminate direct to consumer adverts.

Eliminate gifts, trips, meals for doctors.
- Eliminate free samples
- Eliminate support for professional groups
- Eliminate support for advocacy groups
- Eliminate disease awareness campaigns
- Bigger fines for off-label marketing
Loosen The Coupling Between Diagnosis And

- Insurance-allow first 6 visits without dx
- School services- instead target specific educational deficits
- Disability- require both psychiatric and OT evaluation with focus on impairment not diagnosis. Provide vocational training, job placement, and jobs
Quality Control

- Closely monitor MD prescribing habits
- Identify high prescribers
- Limit polypharmacy
Require documentation from outliers

Publicize MD's who can't justify excessive prescription

Prohibit initial prescription of antipsychotics by primary care doctors
Use Media Against Drug Companies

- Publicize abuses and fines
- Encourage stories about over-diagnosis
- Encourage stories about placebo effects
- Encourage journalist skepticism re industry media releases
Conclusions

Psychiatry is extremely effective and efficient when practiced within appropriate boundaries and for proper indications.
But Diagnostic Inflation Leads To:

- Individual harm
- High economic and social costs
- Misallocation of scarce resources
Change Won't Be Easy

- Multiple powerful forces are promoting diagnostic inflation
- Multiple powerful forces will surely be required to tame it
- Mental well being is not just a psychiatric issue—also requires adequate housing, employment, social programs
Advice

Local problems will differ widely - no one solution

- Use common sense and be skeptical
- Do not be dazzled by 'experts'
Enduring Lessons From Hippocrates

- Rule of thirds - 1/3 get better without treatment; 1/3 need rx; 1/3 nonresponders

- Medical wisdom - telling them apart

- Let's treat those who can benefit

- Not over-diagnose/over-treat the others
DO NO HARM