

Preface

The figures are startling. At least one in four of you in the UK and US will suffer from a mental disorder in a given year.* And if you are one of those lucky ones with a constant spring in your step, the odds are high that you are close to someone less fortunate. That is what the psychiatric industry tells us – we are a population on the brink. And that is why it asserts that its services are more essential than ever before. Psychiatry is a science, after all, and has the tools and knowledge at its disposal to help us when our lives break down. This is the official story we hear, the one gaining airtime in the media, the ear of National Health Service (NHS) policy-makers, and widespread dissemination through celebrity chat-shows and popular magazines. But what if the actual truth about psychiatry were not so sanguine or clear-cut as we have been led to believe? What if there is another more insidious story to be told, one that threatens all of our preconceptions? Well, an alternative story certainly does exist, a deeper and far more maddening story. And in this book I intend to tell it.

Once upon a time, psychiatry was reserved for only the most distressed members of society. This was always a small minority: people who were often removed to asylums, usually against their will, and subjected to esoteric

* This is clearly not just an American and British problem. It's estimated that approximately 450 million people worldwide have a mental health problem – people throughout the developed and developing world. (World Health Organisation, 2001)

treatments. Today, the few have become the many. Not because psychiatric wards have increased in number, but because psychiatric treatments and beliefs about mental distress have now crashed through the walls of the hospital and surged into every corner of contemporary life, affecting how we understand and manage our emotional lives. Just consider the facts. According to recent NHS figures, in 2011 alone, a staggering 47 million prescriptions for antidepressants were dispensed to the British public. And the vast majority of these pills were not prescribed to the stereotypically ‘mad’ characters depicted in Hollywood movies. No, most of their recipients were just like you or me. Average people simply trying to make their way. Perhaps you are one of them. Perhaps someone you love is one of them.

Today, psychiatry’s power and influence is far from abating – it’s growing at a remarkable rate. And in this book I will show you why this is, paradoxically, a very bad thing for our mental health. To substantiate this claim, my method will be simple. I will investigate three medical mysteries: why has psychiatry become the fastest-growing medical specialism when it still has the poorest curative success? Why are psychiatric drugs now more widely prescribed than almost any other medical drugs in history, despite their dubious efficacy? And why does psychiatry, without solid scientific justification, keep expanding the number of mental disorders it believes to exist – from 106 in 1952 to 374 today? What is going on?

To answer these mysteries, I will leave no aspect of the industry unexamined. Each chapter will focus on a different part of the story: how the process of creating new diagnostic categories regularly strays from scientifically accepted

standards; how antidepressants actually work no better than placebo (sugar) pills for most people; how negative drug trials are routinely buried and research is regularly manipulated to convey positive results; how numerous doctors have been enticed by huge rewards from pharmaceutical companies into creating more disorders and prescribing more pills; and how mass-marketing has been unscrupulously employed to conceal from doctors, patients and the wider public the ethical, scientific and treatment flaws of a profession now in serious crisis.

I have written this book to seduce a new generation away from the escalating craze for psychiatric drugs and diagnoses. I reveal through governmental, academic and interview sources that the unhappy truth about psychiatry can be explained by one startling fact: in recent decades many areas of psychiatry have become so lured by power and money that they are in danger of putting the pursuit of pharmaceutical riches and medical status above their patients' well-being. My aim is not to shock anyone gratuitously, just to report what the inconvenient facts suggest: that psychiatry, in the name of helping others, is now in serious peril of better helping itself.

During my journey researching and writing this book I have amassed a vast number of air miles criss-crossing the Atlantic, interviewing some of the leading lights of the psychiatric world. I have consulted the people who have put the profession on the map – the heads of the premier psychiatry schools, the creators of new diagnostic categories, the presidents of national psychiatric associations: the people with long and glowing entries on Wikipedia, the real movers and shakers of the profession. My aim has not been

to incriminate anyone personally, merely to get at the truth. And as my eyes have gradually been opened by discoveries more worrying than I could have anticipated, I have checked and double-checked what I have heard to ensure I've got the story correct. Now that my investigations are complete, it's time to make what I have discovered more freely available. As you follow me in the coming pages, you won't always find the ride comfortable; you will encounter facts and confessions that will shock, baffle and dismay you. But there is no point sugar-coating the facts. For if things are ever to be put right, then what is required above all are people, just like you, understanding and spreading the word that a profession purporting to help us is now seriously, disconcertingly – and in both senses of the term – *cracked*.