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LETTERS

MEDICALISATION OF NORMALITY

Take a stand against “the mayhem of modern psychiatry”

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I read with a now familiar dread Spence’s article on the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, fifth edition (DSM-V).¹ The consequences for the NHS, as it uses an ever more diagnosis defined approach to divide mental health services, will extend beyond psychiatry’s confines and affect everything from prison care to public health policy. Worst, people most susceptible to the revision will be the most vulnerable—grieving elderly people now labelled as depressed and young people prescribed neuroleptics in case they become psychotic.

Modern psychiatry finds itself at a crossroads but unable to proceed for the mire of definition and redefinition that transfixes it. We have already redefined the doctor-patient relationship as that of client-provider and labelled our patients “service users” (with flagrant disregard for the insult in calling anybody a user). Our masters now seek to reduce even normal human experience to mere collections of symptoms.

I worry that DSM-V will reinforce decades long views of psychiatry as subversive. Although its authors have valiantly

tried to realign modern psychiatry with modern medicine, I fear that they will alienate it even more. Spence’s opinion alone is testament to this, tinged as it is with prejudice as he considers the concept of mental illness to be mere opinion (instead of a continuum in which normality is separated from abnormality by dysfunction and risk, much like diabetes or hypertension). Yet, I do agree that all society must take a stand against “the mayhem of modern psychiatry.” Psychiatrists and allied colleagues already have in their tens of thousands; for if this is the direction of things to come, surely we must all say “not in our opinion.”

Competing interests: None declared.

1 Spence D. The psychiatric oligarchs who medicalise normality. *BMJ* 2012;344:e3135. (2 May.)

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