

## Members React to Campaign Discrediting Prozac, Psychiatry

The following is the first of a two-part series to be concluded in the next issue.

by Richard Karel

The impact of Scientology's ongoing war on psychiatry, now focused on the antidepressant drug Prozac, was a topic of discussion in the corridors and lecture halls of this year's annual meeting in New Orleans.

Alcohol, Drug Abuse and Mental Health Administration (ADAMHA) director Frederick Goodwin, M.D., discussed the anti-Prozac campaign of the Scientologist's antipsychiatry affiliate, the Citizen's Commission on Human Rights (CCHR).

"The disingenuously named Citizen's Commission on Human Rights (CCHR) is a Scientology group at war with psychiatry, its primary competitor, and indeed the one profession that has the wherewithal to identify the way Scientology victimizes vulnerable individuals," said Goodwin.

"Obviously, their big target right now is Prozac, but that's simply a target of opportunity. Ritalin was the previous target. Wherever a drug becomes highly potent in the public mind, they'll go after it. The point to remember is that Scientology's war on psychiatry is part of a larger war on medicine."

Through publication of regular newsletters and glossy magazines attacking psychiatry, and through backing organizations such as the Prozac Survivors Support Group (PSSG), CCHR has orchestrated a sophisticated and far-reaching anti-Prozac campaign that has caused sales of Prozac to drop substantially, and, according to some accounts, caused psychiatric patients to stop taking the drug.

As part of their anti-Prozac efforts, CCHR last summer wrote a lengthy letter to Representative John Dingell, chair of the U.S. House Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations,

alleging false advertising of Prozac by Eli Lilly and Company, and urging Dingell to launch an investigation. The letter was ignored, and Dingell Press Secretary Dennis Fitzgibbons told *Psychiatric News* recently that "the subcommittee is not examining the Prozac issue at this time."

Food and Drug Administration (FDA) statistics do not support CCHR's claims that Prozac is a significant risk factor in suicide, according to Goodwin.

There are an estimated 650,000 depressed people on Prozac in the United States, according to Goodwin. Data indicate that suicide among depressed people who have received any treatment is normally about 3.3 percent within the first 10 years of treatment, a percentage that would equate to 21,000 suicides among the 650,000 patients treated with Prozac. To date, however, only 130 suicides for patients receiving Prozac have been reported to the FDA, Goodwin said—or about 0.6 percent of the anticipated norm. That is a very low figure, even taking into account substantial underreporting and the fact that Prozac has been in widespread use for only three years, Goodwin pointed out.

Through the use of CCHR as a front organization, Scientology has been able to establish a facade of authority on psychiatric matters. Scientology's total assets, reported at more than \$200 million in documents released to a federal court in Tampa, Fla., last year, has provided it with a reach far exceeding its total numbers, estimated recently at about 50,000, according to Cynthia Kissler, executive director of the Chicago-based Cult Awareness Network.

"They have so many diverse front groups," Kissler commented. "As far as Scientology is concerned, the very people who might need help the most are being pulled away from the very professionals who could give them the

The late L. Ron Hubbard, founder of the Church of Scientology, in a now famous photograph testing tomatoes for emotional response.

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help. Someone, for example, whose doctor has suggested they go on Prozac for very good reasons might now not even consider it. They do a real disservice by painting the mental health profession as malevolent."

Kissler sees education about the group as crucial and is critical of APA for failing to take an official stand on Scientology and other destructive cults. The APA Committee on Psychiatry and Religion published a book-length report on cults in 1989 that Kissler characterized as "very weak" because it avoided strong criticism of destructive cults.

"Scientology has been able to get a free ride because APA has not taken an official position on mind control," said Kissler.

An estimated five million people have been negatively affected by cults, according to Kissler. If that number of people had been affected by another cause, APA would have had a major focus on it, Kissler contended.

CCHR has attempted to use the academic openness of psychiatric researchers such as Harvard's Martin Teicher, M.D., against the profession

of psychiatry in general and Prozac in particular.

Teicher published a study in the February 1990 *American Journal of Psychiatry* in which he stated that six of 172 patients on Prozac reported intense suicidal ideation, with two of these attempting suicide.

Since its publication, CCHR has frequently cited the article as evidence that Prozac causes otherwise rational people to become suicidal and violent.

"The purpose of our study was to indicate to physicians that there may be some unexpected, paradoxical reactions to Prozac," Teicher told *Psychiatric News*. The Scientologists have made "a real distortion of what we wrote."

The 172 patients he studied were "much more treatment refractory" than the average depressed patient, Teicher observed. Despite this, most reacted positively to Prozac.

Among the six who reacted negatively there was no homicidal ideation, Teicher pointed out. CCHR has charged repeatedly that Prozac triggers homicidal impulses, focusing on the Joseph Wesbecker case.

Wesbecker went on a rampage at the Standard Gravure plant in Louisville, Ky., on September 14, 1989, killing eight people with a semiautomatic rifle before killing himself with a pistol.

According to a toxicological post-mortem performed on Wesbecker by Jefferson County (Ky.) coroner Richard Greathouse, M.D., there was a high therapeutic level of Prozac in Wesbecker's blood when he went berserk. There were also subtherapeutic levels of other antidepressants including trazodone, imipramine, desipramine, and nortriptyline, as well as traces of lithium and temazepam.

"We had to thoroughly investigate the whole matter," said Greathouse. "We got complete cooperation from the Dista Corporation (an Eli Lilly subsidiary). This man had threatened to blow this place up months and months before he was on Prozac. He was going to make one of these remote-controlled model planes and put a bomb in it and put it in the roof of the Standard Gravure Company and blow it up. He tried to kill himself, major attempts, three or four times, before he was ever on Prozac. He was a chronic paranoid schizophrenic. He'd been under the care of three or four psychiatrists, the latest of which had him on Prozac for the second trial period."

"Our whole point with Wesbecker see 'Prozac,' page 30

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was that he was just another psychiatric failure," commented Sapford Block, CCHR executive director. "Prozac is not the only drug that causes violence."

But Block insisted that "it's very clear to us that Prozac was a contributing factor. Prozac is just another in a long line of drugs in psychiatric mass murder." He compared modern psychiatry to Nazi eugenics. "They're not marching them off to the gas chambers anymore," he contended. "They're marching them off to the psychiatric hospitals and to the drug companies' pockets."

Although Block insisted that CCHR is independent of the Church of Scientology, CCHR press releases state that they are issued by "Citizen's Commission on Human Rights/Church of Scientology."

Established by the Church of Scientology in 1969, CCHR incorporated in 1982 as a separate entity, according to Block. "The majority of our funding is from private individuals. The Church encourages Scientologists to support us. We have a very close relationship, obviously, with Scientology. I'm a minister. A lot of our members are Scientologists."

Block insisted that the Church could not be in competition with psychiatry because it will not admit anyone for "religious counseling" who has undergone conventional psychiatric treatment. "The thing that drives APA crazy is that it is working and it's still here," said Block.

As part of its anti-Prozac campaign, CCHR has issued a number of nationwide press releases. One such release, dated July 12, 1990, reads in part: "A nationwide warning has been issued on the psychiatric antidepressant drug Prozac cautioning that the drug can generate intense, violent, suicidal thoughts and can push unsuspecting users of the drug to commit murder."

Only in the second paragraph does it state that "the warning was issued by the Citizen's Commission on Human Rights, a Los Angeles-based watchdog group established by the Church of Scientology."

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