

SHOULD CHRISTIANS USE PSYCHIATRISTS & MEDICINE?

by Dr Carina le Roux

Many Christian psychiatrists have been asked: "How can you be a psychiatrist if you are a Christian?" It is not uncommon for Christians consulting psychiatrists to express guilt feelings for doing so. They then often go on to explain how they have been struggling with their psychiatric problems for a long time and how they have tried to overcome it by seeking different forms of counselling or using natural remedies. Quite often they are on the verge of committing suicide or have attempted it already before seeking psychiatric help. Even more sadly one may hear about someone who had successfully committed suicide, without having received any psychiatric help.



Why are Christians negative and skeptical towards psychiatry and medication?

- They view psychiatry / psychology as secular and humanistic, with values clashing with Biblical principles.
- They have a sense of failure for not having been able to obey biblical instructions, like rejoicing in the Lord or having faith.
- They fear that other Christians will judge, criticize and stigmatize them.
- They do not want to have a bad testimony or to disappoint God.
- They do not want to put their trust in medication and become dependant on it

or addicted to it, but would rather only put their trust in God.

How should Christians view psychiatric help and the use of medication?

Most people look at mental illness differently than physical illness. They tend to believe that mental illness is due to character flaw or moral weakness. It is however important to recognize that the brain is an organ which is vulnerable to diseases just like any other organ in the body. When people have functional brain illness, their brains are diseased and they have chemical imbalances which cause psychiatric disorders like mood, anxiety, schizophrenic and other disorders.

It would be inconsistent medical practice to ignore psychiatric issues, which research and genetic studies have clearly shown to have a physical dimension. Psychiatric medications should be considered if symptoms are significant or functioning is impaired. Life and death may hang in the balance! When a depression for example, becomes so severe that it interferes with a person's productivity, interpersonal relationships, spiritual life and daily activities, anti-depressant medication is necessary.

The appropriate use of medications has brought relief from suffering to countless individuals – restoring spiritual, physical and emotional well-being. Using such medications should actually not be viewed differently from for example a diabetic using insulin. It should be emphasized that anti-depressants, anti-psychotics (used to treat psychiatric conditions like schizophrenia) and mood stabilizers are not addictive. Calming and sleeping tablets should however be used with caution and only for a limited period.

Can Christians also develop psychiatric disorders?

As Christians we are not from the world, but we are still in the world, which is broken and imperfect. So much can go wrong in our lives

and in our bodies! Christians are not exempt from suffering from psychiatric disorders.



We were fearfully and wonderfully made in the image of God, with the ability to gain knowledge and to put it to work. Therefore Christians should consider all knowledge as a gift from our Heavenly Father, the Creator of all things and such knowledge should be used responsibly. Psychiatric / psychological help and medication should be seen as part of God's provision, which we should use responsibly and with thanksgiving!

Is psychiatric medication the whole solution?

The cause of much controversy surrounding the subject of the use of psychiatric medication lies in the tendency of some people to view psychiatric illness as either a totally physical or a totally emotional / spiritual phenomenon. Neither of these views adequately describe the complexity of human illness. Humans consist of an integrated whole of body, mind and soul; none of which can be viewed separately. The greatest success in treatment is usually achieved when all aspects of the person are addressed simultaneously usually in conjunction with therapy or counselling.

Christians should continue to strive towards taking up their personal responsibility to stand in the right relationship with God, to receive the Holy Spirit's guidance and to follow it obediently. There are so many resources to equip Christians towards physical, emotional and spiritual well-being. I encourage you to “..choose life” (Deut 30:19) God intends that we would be healthy in every aspect of our being and that we would have abundant life! “.. I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10).



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