


The NEW ENGLAND JOURNAL *of* MEDICINE


Perspective
OCTOBER 31, 2019


Medicine and the Mind — The Consequences of Psychiatry's Identity Crisis

Caleb Gardner, M.D., and Arthur Kleinman, M.D.




*But something has gone wrong in contemporary academic and clinical psychiatry. Checklist-style amalgamations of symptoms have taken the place of thoughtful diagnosis, and **trial-and-error “medication management”** has taken over practice to an alarming degree.*







... Ironically, although these limitations are widely recognized by experts in the field, the prevailing message to the public and the rest of medicine remains that the solution to psychological problems involves matching the “right” diagnosis with the “right” medication.


Consequently, psychiatric diagnoses and medications proliferate under the banner of scientific medicine, though there is no comprehensive biologic understanding of either the causes or the treatments of psychiatric disorders.






*... In the meantime, psychiatry finds itself plagued by **overprescription of psychiatric medication** for a large segment of the population; abandonment and incarceration of people with chronic, severe mental illness; and an **increasingly unwieldy diagnostic system of overlapping symptom checklists**.*





*... We believe that a fundamental rethinking of psychiatric knowledge creation and training is in order. If only the highest-quality biologic research were supported, **substantial funding could be redirected to psychosocial, cultural, public health, and community studies that directly support the work of practicing psychiatrists responding to the needs of patients, families, and communities.***



The image shows the front cover of the book 'Saving Normal' by Allen Frances, M.D. The cover is a deep red color with a fine, woven texture. In the upper left corner, the word 'saving' is printed in a bold, black, sans-serif font. In the center, there is a white, rectangular piece of paper with deckled, torn edges, as if it were a sticky note or a page torn from a book. On this white paper, the word 'nor•mal' is printed in a bold, black, sans-serif font, with a small dot between 'nor' and 'mal'. To the right of 'nor•mal' is the phonetic pronunciation '(nôr'nal)'. Below this, the first point of a list is printed in a smaller, black, sans-serif font: '1. an insider's revolt against out-of-control psychiatric diagnosis, DSM-5, big pharma, and the medicalization of ordinary life'. At the bottom of the cover, the author's name 'Allen Frances, M.D.' is printed in a bold, black, sans-serif font, followed by a superscripted '1'. Below the author's name, the text 'Chair of the DSM-IV Task Force' is printed in a smaller, black, sans-serif font. The book cover is set against a white background. To the left of the book cover is a large, solid orange semi-circle. To the right of the book cover, there are several short, thick, yellow curved lines that appear to be part of a larger graphic element.

nor•mal (nôr'nal)

1. an insider's revolt against out-of-control psychiatric diagnosis, *DSM-5*, big pharma, and the medicalization of ordinary life

Allen Frances, M.D.¹

¹Chair of the DSM-IV Task Force

Allen Frances worries that varieties of normal experience are being pathologized and medicalized...