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"Mental health", emotions, psychological pain: just what are we trying to treat?

At the annual Prescrire Prize ceremony, a debate on the role of "mental health" and psychoactive medications in our society

On 7 October 2010, the Prescrire Editorial Staff announced the winners of the 2010 Prescrire Prize, awarded to 5 books of interest to the public at large and/or healthcare professionals.

Among the winners was the French edition of Christopher Lane's book, "Shyness, how normal behavior became a sickness" (Yale University Press, New Haven 2007: 272 pages). This book demonstrates the arbitrariness that characterised the preparation of the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual), a highly influential work when it comes to how mental disorders – or what passes as such – are classified.

Prescrire's awards ceremony included a debate on the theme ""Mental health", emotions, psychological pain: just what are we trying to treat?", with the French psychiatrists Alain Gérard and Michaël Guyader.

In 2010, the role of "mental health" in society poses a whole host of questions, from the overmedication of existential difficulties – or even emotions – to how we can guarantee access to quality care for patients in need, those who are suffering from crippling depression or a serious psychotic disorder.

Pharmaceutical companies who exploit the difficulties of existence for financial gain? A "lock-em-up" approach to "dangerous" mental patients? Prevention, beginning in childhood, of deviant or delinquent behaviour? Just what is the definition of madness? Relegating psychotic patients to the street or to prison? Etc.

So many questions that are of concern to every member of society – beginning first and foremost with healthcare professionals.

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The winners of the 2010 Prescrire Prize :

- Cleland J "Orthopaedic clinical examination: an evidence based approach for physical therapists", Elsevier, Philadelphia 2005: 515 pages. Prize awarded to the French edition: "Examen clinique de l'appareil locomoteur. Tests, évaluation et niveaux de preuves" Elsevier Masson SAS, Issy-les-Moulineaux 2007: 514 pages, €59.
- Lane C "Shyness, how normal behavior became a sickness" Yale University Press, New Haven 2007: 272 pages. Prize awarded to the French edition "Comment la psychiatrie et l'industrie pharmaceutique ont médicalisé nos émotions" Flammarion, Paris 2009: 379 pages, €26.
- GISTI "Sans-papiers mais pas sans droits" (5e édition) GISTI, Paris 2009: 72 pages, €5 (+ mailing charges).
- Kidari F under the direction of Aouar L. "Le guide de l'expertise médicale amiable en 10 points" Association des Paralysés de France (APF) and the Ombudsman of the French government, Paris 2010: 38 pages, free.
- Bruneton J "Pharmacognosie. Phytochimie, Plantes médicinales" (4e édition), EM Inter / Lavoisier Tec & Doc, Paris 2009: 1 270 pages, €165.

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