

# Medicating Anxiety since the Civil War

From opium to clonazepam

Benjamin Crocker MD

# Antebellum Agrarian Intoxicants

- Alcohol provided major source of US federal tax income 1789-1861
- 17<sup>th</sup> century New Englanders consumed a lot of alcohol, but did not recognize alcoholism

# Empires of addiction

- Shipping trade & mercantilism facilitated trade in alcohol, tobacco and opium 17th-19<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- Imperial naval militarism linked to trade in intoxicants
- Imported tobacco epidemic preceded opiate epidemic in China in early 19<sup>th</sup> century

# Opiate of the Masses

- Opiates available OTC in US and Europe for most of 19<sup>th</sup> century
- Alcohol distribution became more regionalized with better transport after Civil War: saloon system, beer vs. spirits
- Opiates and cannabis both legitimate medicines and associated with minority groups.

# Bromides and barbiturates

- Bromides available OTC well into mid-19<sup>th</sup> century: Dr. Miles' Nervine
- Barbiturates early product of German chemistry

# Opiate controls

- Treatment of Civil War wounds led to opiate dependence, morphine and heroin, hypodermic needles increased potency.
- Xenophobic association of opiate smoking with Chinese Immigrants, among the first to be excluded from US in 1880's
- Culminated in Harrison Act
- Medical prescribing laws grew with allopathic professional movement & state licensing

# Prohibition

- Reduced overall alcohol consumption and morbidity
- Deprived govt. of taxes and led to organized crime & black market
- Speakeasy replaced saloon, female drinking increased

# Reefer Madness

- Cannabis made illegal in 1930's via Federal tax laws
- Associated with Black & Latino minorities and hipsters
- AMA defended it as medicine
- Medical Marijuana dispensaries coming to Maine?



# WWII & Freudianism

- Psychiatry greatly expanded in war effort:  
Combat Neurosis
- Rosie the Riveter changed gender roles
- Alcohol and the standing army
- Wonder drugs produced industrially,  
needed prescriber control.
- Explosion of advertising in postwar boom
- TV & suburbs took off

# Miltown

- Followed close on the heels to Thorazine
- Promoted by patent medicine house without detail men at first: indirect promotion to consumers
- Required prescription, easy refill at first
- Highly profitable
- “Age of anxiety”
- Toxicity denied, promoted as a consumer product

# Valium

- Development of benzos stimulated by success of carbamates
- Less toxicity than carbamates, Roche dominated with 2 drugs
- Rapidly took over tranquilizer market

# Kefauver, Humphrey and Kennedy

- Senate hearings stretched over decades
- Thalidomide scandal led to demand for proof of efficacy and more general prescribing restrictions by 1962.
- Humphrey was a pharmacist.
- Shorter tells the story of DESI and the weeding out of many combo and carbamate drugs

# Benzo panic of the 70's

- Battle over scheduling, addiction fears, social criticism deflated benzo prescribing during the 1970's and ended the reign of Valium (which then went off patent)
- Kennedy hearings questioned safety and efficacy, many Medicaid programs refused to cover.
- Benzo exclusion from Medicare D was an echo of this process
- Nyswander says benzos more addicting than heroin

# DSM indications and Xanax

- Criticisms of social problem prescribing blunted by claim of DSM objectivity & reliability.
- Outcome studies facilitated, especially about panic
- Alprazolam replaced diazepam, then clonazepam & lorazepam
- SRIs got on anxiety bandwagon
- But benzos still popular choice for anxiety in 21st century (Goisman, et al)

# 4 books about the age of tranquilizers

- Before Prozac, Edward Shorter 2009
- Happy Pills, David Herzberg 2009
- The age of Anxiety, Andrea Tone, 2009
- Small Comfort, Mickey Smith, 1985