

Rogers Prize keynote speaker shows antidepressants no better than placebos

The 2013 Dr. Rogers Prize for Excellence in Complementary and Alternative Medicine will be celebrated with a gala award dinner and free

afternoon colloquium in

Vancouver on September

While organizers are

the list of short

listed nominees for the

biennial \$250,000 prize,

the work of their Gala

Award Dinner keynote

speaker, Dr. Irving Kirsch

— Associate Director of

the Program in Placebo

Studies at Harvard Medi-

cal School and author of *The Emperor's*

New Drugs: Exploding the Antidepressant

Myth—will be of interest to anyone

who has been following the story about

the provincial government's shenanigans

with UBC's drug review team.

Kirsch's research, which is based on the drug companies' own data, dismantles the case for antidepressants, showing there is little or no differ-



Dr. Irving Kirsch

ence in effect from placebo. His findings were

provocative enough to

compel the UK National

Health Service to com-

plete their own review

of the antidepressant

clinical trials, which

resulted in the NHS

dramatically revamping

the way antidepressants

are prescribed. Dr. Tim

Kendall, Co-Director of the Review,

told *60 Minutes* that the published evi-

dence significantly overestimated the

effect of the drugs and understated the

side effects.

In addition to relating his experiences as a 'troublemaker' at the dinner, Dr. Kirsch will open the afternoon colloquium "Exploring the Mind-Body Continuum" with a brief appearance to describe the placebo effect and its significance, which will set the stage for further exploration of the day's topic. Given the latest revision of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V), which lowers the criteria for diagnosis of some mental health conditions while broadly expanding the definitions of others, Dr.

of Research at the Penny George Institute for Health and Healing, will present his work at the Colloquium. Dr. Dusek was co-author of the 2006 STEP Project (more commonly referred to as the Templeton Prayer Study), a \$2.4 million dollar study that showed, contrary to expectations, that cardiac patients who knew they were being prayed for had significantly worse outcomes than those in the blinded study. "We thought that the certainty of knowing about the prayers of outsiders would reduce complications that accompany bypass surgery. But the results were paradoxical." The study researchers don't believe the study refutes the power of prayer so much as it reveals the possibility that participants may have believed they had been assigned to the prayer group because they were at greater likelihood of negative consequences. "We found increased amounts of adrenalin, a sign of stress, in the blood of patients who knew strangers were praying for them," explains Dr. Dusek. "It's possible that we inadvertently raised the stress levels of these people."



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About the prize

The \$250,000 Dr. Rogers Prize for Excellence in Complementary and Alternative Medicine is awarded every two years to celebrate the achievements of researchers, practitioners and others in the field of complementary and alternative (CAM) health care. The largest prize of its kind in North America, the first Dr. Rogers Prize was awarded in 2007.

Open to individuals whose complementary or alternative medicine activities are carried out within Canada, the recipient of the Dr. Rogers Prize is an individual who embodies the vision, leadership and integrity as that of Dr. Roger Hayward Rogers for whom the award is named. A Canadian pioneer in the field of CAM, Dr. Rogers was among the first to provide non-traditional therapies for cancer patients. He was appointed to the Order of British Columbia in recognition of his groundbreaking work.

September 26: Free afternoon colloquium 1-5PM, Fairmont Waterfront Hotel. Reception and award dinner follow in the evening. Registration and ticket information for both events at www.drrogersprize.org See display ad this issue.

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Kirsch's insights should be of great significance to the general public and medical community alike.

Past revisions of diagnostic criteria have resulted in increases in diagnoses greater than originally predicted and the recent removal of "bereavement exclusion" (i.e., grief as a factor to be considered) from the DSM for clinical depression is cause for concern. The increasing medicalization of everyday human experience and emotion has been a boon for big pharma. In the 30 years since the introduction of Prozac, prescriptions for antidepressant drugs have increased by more than 400%. Without a sea change in doctor and patient awareness, these most recent revisions could well foreshadow a boom for pharmaceutical companies marketing psychotropic drugs.

Dr. Jeffrey Dusek, formerly of Harvard Medical School and now Director