

Spotlight on Institutional Psychiatry

By Don Weitz

Psychiatric survivors, activists and human rights advocates, and some lawyers, got it right: British Columbia's Mental Health Act (MHA) is the most repressive in Canada. Like all "mental health" legislation, B.C.'s MHA violates many of the civil and human rights guaranteed to all Canadians under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. But many agree that what goes on, legally, in the name of "mental health care" under this particular Act is even more egregious than usual.

Spotlight on Institutional Psychiatry (May 2018) is a one-time newsletter in which psychiatric survivors and allies respond, directly and indirectly, to *Operating in Darkness: BC's Mental Health Detention System*. *Operating in Darkness* is the groundbreaking and powerful report issued in November 2017 by the province's Community Legal Assistance Society (CLAS).

B.C.'s MHA legitimizes discrimination, forced psychiatric procedures, psychological assault, chemical assault (forced drugging), physical assault ("take-downs") and solitary confinement ("seclusion"). It also authorizes blatant violations of doctors' legal obligation to obtain informed consent before administering "treatment."

The personal statements of several survivors and other critics in *Spotlight on Institutional Psychiatry* ring true. The newsletter is rich with honest and informed critiques, as well as empowering personal testimony. These writers (and the incredible illustrator, Ronda E. Richardson – also a psychiatric survivor) are sure a helluva lot more credible than the psychobabble and fraudulent labels promoted as "medical science" in the *DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders)*, psychiatry's official bible of myths and lies. Thanks to the brilliant work of *Spotlight's* courageous contributors, readers will quickly get a clear picture of the outrageous tortures to which B.C. psychiatric inmates are routinely subjected in the name of "mental health."

Aside from my lifelong, passionate battle against the barbaric procedure known as "electroconvulsive therapy" (electroshock), I have been trying for years to get investigative reporters at the *Toronto Star* and other publications to look into psychiatry's use of solitary confinement, in particular; I very much hope that this practice will be abolished in all psychiatric prisons (including "mental health" centres, units, wards, group homes and boarding homes), as it recently has been in

federal prisons. And I hope that this needed reform will happen more quickly when many people read the descriptions of solitary confinement and other tortures in *Spotlight*, and especially in *Operating in Darkness*. The latter, though not produced by survivors, goes into great detail about what happens to people getting “professional help” in BC – as observed by legal representatives with no power, under the MHA, to actually help their clients. Together, the two documents provide a scathing indictment of psychiatric legislation and practice.

The people who produced *Spotlight on Institutional Psychiatry* deserve much praise and support, as well as a wide readership, for shining a bright light not only on B.C.’s discredited MHA, but on psychiatry itself. Now is the time to get rid of the MHA and all “mental health” legislation, which is inherently oppressive and discriminatory. Now is the time to create and fund empowering and humane alternatives to psychiatry, in British Columbia and everywhere.

Don Weitz is an insulin-shock survivor and author of the forthcoming book, Resistance Matters: The Radical Vision of an Antipsychiatry Activist.