

Jasenn Zaejian, Ph.D.
Return address redacted

May 24, 2013

Representative Henry Waxman,
2204 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: May 22, 2013 hearing of the House Committee on Energy & Commerce:
“Examining SAMHSA’s Role in Delivering Services to the Severely Mentally Ill.”

Dear Congressman Waxman,

While I am living just south of your district, in Orange County, as a retired professional clinical psychologist, having been licensed and worked in New York, California, and Nebraska, I am hoping you seriously consider what I have to say regarding the recent House oversight hearing on mental health and SAMSHA.

It was apparent that your committee received unbalanced testimony from a few individuals who have dedicated their careers to promoting the use of coercive psychiatry as a solution to their unscientific opinions regarding mental health and mental illness.

To wit, E. Fuller Torrey has, at least since the 1970’s, to my memory, engaged in a national campaign to promote the incarceration of folks diagnosed as mentally ill, when there is little, if any empirical justification for his opinions.

Years ago, history records that Torrey joined a former advertising industry executive, D.J. Jaffe, with no professional mental health background to form the Treatment Advocacy Center (TAC), to distance himself from the National Alliance For the Mentally Ill (NAMI) after it was uncovered, by investigative journalists, to be covertly funded by the drug companies to promote pharmaceutical treatments, under the guise of a “family support” organization. “...Jaffe, an advertising executive, advised mental health advocates that “from a marketing perspective it may be necessary to capitalize on violence” to pass laws compelling psychiatric outpatients to take psychotropic medication. Soon Jaffe joined forces with Dr. E. Fuller Torrey, a psychiatrist who shared Jaffe's compulsory medication agenda.”

(<http://stigmanet.net/FEAR%20TACTICS%20IN%20ADVOCACY%2015%20EXAMPLES>). Since then, this was the path that Torrey and associates followed.

Any superficial investigation of Torrey will yield numerous criticisms, beginning in New York State, of his egregious activities, all conducted to restrict individual freedoms of mentally ill folks. He has presented his scientifically unsupported opinions in many forums, since that time, especially regarding “clinical dangerousness,” (my clinical specialty when I was working as a forensic and clinical neuropsychologist).

Sally Satel, has been advocating coercive psychiatry for many years. By their scientifically unsupported opinions, she, along with Torrey and other NAMI advocates, have attempted to discredit and malign major scientific studies illustrating the relationship of a lack of dangerousness in mentally ill individuals. While their opinions are certainly not based on science, they continually cite “science” as their support.

Dr. Satel, in her testimony attempted to associate a deficiency of psychiatry in decision making organizations, as part of the problem. This is merely another of her unsupported opinions. In fact, it is the field of psychiatry that has brought us to the recent conclusions by the NIMH director indicating that the agency will no longer rely on the scientifically unsupported Diagnostic Manual of the American Psychiatric Association for research studies, as it represents a consensus of opinions and weak validity. It is also the field of psychiatry that has effectively prevented the development of effective, non-pharmaceutical treatments of severely mentally ill folks, as such effective treatments would detract from their control of the field of mental health and interfere with their economic interests.

Dr. Satel testified that the Assisted Outpatient Treatment or Assisted Outpatient Therapy (AOT) programs are “...the most effective...for individuals with severe mental illness.” The years of accumulated evidence in New York State, California counties where it is practiced, and other countries, presents the opposite of what she attests to. There is no evidence that involuntary AOT provides more effective treatment than voluntary treatment, in large studies in the US and other countries (for some of that research, see my 2011 presentation regarding California’s Laura’s Law implementation before the Orange County Board of Supervisors: <http://relatedness.org/lauraslawnov182011.pdf.pdf>) In fact, AOT has proven to be racist in its application, in addition to its ineffectiveness. Moreover, pharmaceutical treatment of mental illness has been proven, over and over again in large studies, to be ineffective and deleterious to an individual’s overall health.

There are many psychiatrists and psychologists, well published, with extensive research credentials who have opinions, based on scientific research, in direct opposition to Torrey and Satel.

Over the years, SAMSHA, with its intelligent, creative, and progressive leadership has brought hope and a future to the many people whom Torrey and Satel would have had incarcerated. The SAMSHA conferences are clearly of benefit as a forum for discussions and developments of alternatives to the coercive psychiatry whose very foundations and tenets of beliefs have recently been proven scientifically invalid.

It is very disturbing that the oversight committee did not hear testimony from internationally prominent scientific experts having opposing views of the nature of “dangerousness” of the mentally ill, based on science, not personal (cf. clinical) opinion.

Sincerely,

Jasenn Zaejian, Ph.D.,
Retired Clinical Psychologist