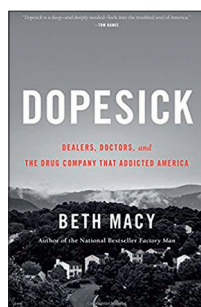


# Life & Times Books

## **Dopesick: Dealers, Doctors, and the Drug Company that Addicted America**

**Beth Macy**

*Head of Zeus, an Apollo book, 2018, HB, 384pp, £20.00, 978-1788549370*



### **HISTORY OF THE OPIOID CRISIS IN THE US**

*Dopesick* is an unflinching look at the opioid crisis in the US, which is predicted to kill more Americans in a decade than HIV has since it emerged in the 1980s.

Beth Macy tells the story from the point of view of the communities that have been devastated by a surge in opioid addicts and heroin users. Macy puts the blame firmly at the foot of Purdue Pharma, the makers of OxyContin, who marketed the drug as a safe analgesic for non-cancer pain with the potential for addiction of less than 1%. She details their massive annual marketing budget (\$4bn), the financial bonuses the drug reps were given, and the way that family doctors continued to prescribe the drugs to avoid affecting their income-linked patient satisfaction scores. The ease with which doctors prescribed these drugs and the considerable volumes prescribed to patients flooded these communities with opioids. Patients, now addicted, soon realised that they could rub off the slow-release coating from the drugs, snorting or injecting the contents for an immediate high.

Macy documents the initial denial and then disbelief in rural towns as ordinary people suddenly started dying from drug overdoses. She shares heartbreaking stories from addicts and their families, which all seem to start with a prescription for seemingly harmless painkillers from their doctor. She finds that the same health system that allowed such easy access to these drugs makes accessing drug detoxification and treatments like methadone almost impossible.

Truly shocking in some places, *Dopesick* is a wake-up call for doctors and the pharmaceutical industry to examine the way we prescribe opioids and the catastrophic harm that can be done when we give these out indiscriminately and without proper monitoring. It gives some context to recent events that have led to bankruptcy filing by Purdue Pharma, as it attempts to shield the Sackler family's private wealth from over 2600 lawsuits seeking billions of dollars in damages led by a number of local governments and state prosecutors.

**Thomas Hodson,**

GP Partner, Springfield House Medical Practice, Eccles, Greater Manchester.

**Email:** [thomas.hodson1@nhs.net](mailto:thomas.hodson1@nhs.net)

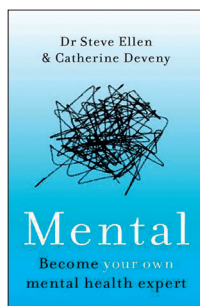
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3399/bjgp19X706445>

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Mental: Everything You Never Knew You Needed to Know about Mental Health**

**Steve Ellen and Catherine Deveny**

*Head of Zeus, an Anima book, 2019, PB, 416pp, £9.99, 978-1789540673*



### **SELF-HELP FOR MENTAL HEALTH**

*Mental* is a good basic introduction into mental health care from the patient's perspective. The book would be ideal for a person with a new mental health diagnosis or family member/carer. The authors, who have themselves had mental health problems, speak in a personal way, as reflected in their stories. This book would make a good assistant for someone going through the journey from diagnosis to treatment, answering a lot of the questions it may be difficult to find online. The book has more detailed subsections that work through a basic guide to different mental health conditions including anxiety, depression, psychosis, as well as personality disorders

and addictions. There is also information on organic brain disorders such as Parkinson's and dementia. One obvious topic that seems to be missed is self-harm. As GPs we see a large number of patients who self-harm, and the book would benefit from a section on this with some self-help advice on how to reduce harmful thoughts. The authors focus on the adult population, and, although it does have a brief section on child and adolescent mental health, parents may be better off looking elsewhere for substantial information.

The medication section features some useful tables on the likelihood of experiencing certain side effects, which could be helpful for decision making and planning. These are presented in a visual style that makes it easier to understand for patients. The book also goes through the mysteries of psychotherapy, which as GPs we don't always understand. The final section contains a unique guide to self-help, detailing suggestions for patients to help manage symptoms and aid recovery, such as writing, physical exercise, courses, and music. Finding a good guide to mental health problems can be difficult but this book offers up a fresh presentation of the key facts and information for patients in a friendly and helpful way.

**Rebecca Cox,**

GP Academic Clinical Fellow, University of Oxford, Oxford.

**Email:** [rebecca.cox@phc.ox.ac.uk](mailto:rebecca.cox@phc.ox.ac.uk)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3399/bjgp19X706457>

\*\*\*\*\*

**Help**

**Simon Amstell**

*Vintage, 2019, PB, 224pp, £8.99, 978-1784705695*



### **COMEDY AND THE CONSTRUCT OF SELF**

Beginning with Simon Amstell's childhood,