

Doctors argue that depression 'should not be seen as a disease'

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DEPRESSION should be viewed as an emotion rather than a disease, according to the authors of a controversial new book.

Consultant psychiatrist Dr Michael Corry of Clane General Hospital and Dublin psychotherapist Dr Aine Tubridy question the widespread use of drugs to treat depression, saying it is more "band-aid" than cure.

One in five of the population was prescribed anti-depressants last year at a cost of 100m.

However, while these can give a "short uplift to mood", they can mask the underlying cause and lead to relapse on withdrawal, the medics insist.

The doctors make the claims in their book, 'Depression: An Emotion not a Disease', and call for more emphasis on psychotherapy to provide insights into problems and behavioural changes.

Commenting on the book, Dr Siobhan Barry, spokesperson for the Irish Psychiatric Association, said the views expressed would not be termed unorthodox.

"What would be unorthodox is if they were saying that antidepressant medication never had a place in the treatment of depression," she said.

Options

Dr Barry said that different kinds of treatment were needed for various types of depression which vary in severity, and some people on anti-depressants might benefit from having them reviewed, with other options considered by their doctor.

Growing numbers of antidepressants were being prescribed but it was open to question if more people were depressed, she added.

The authors emphasise the need to look at a range of treatments for depression - such as sleep, exercise, nutrition, acupuncture, yoga, massage and psychotherapy.

They appeal to their colleagues to join them in seeking better ways to help vulnerable people suffering from depression.

They said it was impossible to separate depression from its causes - such as sexual abuse, bullying, dysfunctional relationships, poverty, panic, broken hearts and the increasing demands on everyone to "have a life" and make ends meet.

If people saw depression as an emotion it could be viewed as empowering, optimistic and liberating, putting the sufferer back at the helm rather than at the the mercy of disease.

They argue: "If we stand back and look at depression, it has few of the characteristics of a disease.

"If, for example, you lose your job or your lover rejects you and you become depressed, would your depression not immediately lift if your job was reinstated and your lover returned? This would not be the case if you had renal illness, cancer, diabetes or any other disease.

"Many a depression would be lifted instantly by a Lotto win or the departure of an abusive spouse."

Dr Barry pointed out one of the problems with psychiatrists working in the public system is that they can have a case list of up to 400 patients.

This means the amount of time they can devote to the individual patient is curtailed even though they would benefit from being able to talk more.

"If you threw out the disease label it would probably not make a whit of difference to how depression is treated," she added.

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