

Book Review

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The Zyprexa Papers

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As a licensed mental health professional of 40 years and a human rights activist who has worked with patients in extreme states, I found *The Zyprexa Papers* to be engrossing and inspiring. Readers will experience in precise detail the secret corruption of a corporate behemoth who nakedly put their profit margin before the cost of human life and suffering. *The Zyprexa Papers* is a comprehensive presentation of a powerful sequence of events in which Jim Gottstein exposed a pharmaceutical company whose antipsychotic medication could harm psychiatric patients.

Jim Gottstein is a practicing attorney with a degree from Harvard Law School. He's also a psychiatric survivor and has been a mental health human rights activist lawyer for decades.

Through the public interest law firm Law Project for Psychiatric Rights (PsychRights), he has represented many people to help them avoid forced medication, electroshock, and hospitalization.

His eye-opening book *The Zyprexa Papers*, reveals his courageous legal stand against drug giant Lilly that grew into a national scandal, but had begun with Gottstein representing a man in court who was the victim of a forced medication, Zyprexa.

An activist doctor expert witness had obtained a massive trove of secret Zyprexa documents during a class action lawsuit against Lilly, and recruited Gottstein to be part of an exposé of the covered-up, deadly potential harm of its top-selling drug, the antipsychotic Zyprexa.

The exposé quickly culminated in a series of revelatory articles on the front page of *The New York Times*.

Lilly's army of lawyers at once got the courts to threaten Gottstein with criminal and civil contempt charges, and they also threatened to go after his law license for publicly exposing the hidden corporate documents that showed Lilly had committed enormous dishonesty in hiding the potential harm to patients of developing diabetes in the clinical trials for Zyprexa.

The documents also showed how Lilly was systematically misleading prescribers of the inherent harm from the dramatic weight gain, diabetes, and metabolic syndrome occurring in a significant percentage of patients, plus Lilly was campaigning family practice doctors and psychiatrists to give Zyprexa to children and seniors off-label, for whom it was not approved by the FDA.

Gottstein knew that patients in the mental health system died 20 to 25 years earlier than the national average, and the metabolic syndrome and diabetes were factors in those avoidable deaths.

Gottstein and his partner in the exposé, Dr. Egilman, were so truly threatened by Lilly and the courts that “Both of use felt going to prison would be worth exposing the great harm being done by Zyprexa. We were hoping to keep thousands upon thousands more people from being killed by Zyprexa” (Gottstein, 2021b, p. 27).

The documents demonstrated

Lilly had known from the very beginning that Zyprexa caused massive weight gain, diabetes, and other metabolic problems in a large percentage of patients and not only didn't tell doctors about it, but also actively denied the problems when people started experiencing them (Gottstein, 2021a, p. 9)

The good news for Gottstein was that the Lilly legal team was always one step behind him, so he was able to finally escape looming contempt charges or an attack on his law license.

By the time the Lilly legal team received court orders demanding Gottstein return all the documents, the several, almost-daily front-page the *New York Times* articles based on the documents had already been published.

It's remarkable that Gottstein had also early on sent the secret documents to several very hard-core activists in the psychiatric survivor movement, asking them to send them out over the internet in a viral, irretrievable flood of guerrilla-style truth posting.

As the documents flooded the activist networks, the worldwide activist community adopted a rallying cry of boldly proclaiming, “I am Jim” in response to Lilly ratcheting up the threats of punishment against Gottstein, invoking the fabled chorus that echoed, “I am Spartacus.”

It should be recognized that Gottstein's activism is also aimed at creating compassionate alternatives to psychiatric treatment and abuse, as well as protecting the victims of it. He, like countless others, is living proof that a humanistic approach to emotional suffering can serve to relieve the pain without a person being drugged, shocked, or imprisoned.

From 2009 through 2015, the only alternative, compassion-based, medication-free extreme state sanctuary in the United States was open in Alaska because Gottstein founded a Soteria House there. Soteria was a model program in the 1970s and 1980s created by Loren Mosher, based on R.D. Laing's Kingsley Hall refuge for people in extreme states.

Gottstein's clear and measured writing style helps to make the controversial and provocative topic of corporate negligence impacting psychiatric patients be accessible to readers who are suffering emotional distress, as well as professionals, family members and caregivers.

In Gottstein's lawyerly fashion, he presents a convincing and methodical case about the national Zyprexa scandal he ignited, while his narrative reads like a nonfiction thriller exposé of David and Goliath proportions, where a psychiatric survivor lawyer from Alaska takes on one of the biggest corporations in the United States.

More traditional readers might question the validity of the fairly obvious radical stance of the book that is based on Gottstein's basic rejection of the psychiatric disease model of human emotional suffering. That model espouses almost universal pharmaceutical treatments rather than the humanistic non-invasive approaches that Gottstein champions.

The Zyprexa Papers is a well-written, first-person account that presents a compelling argument that legally protecting vulnerable psychiatric patients from harm is a moral duty. Doing that, according to Gottstein, is as much of a moral obligation as providing humanistic alternatives for those in emotional distress.

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