

Book Reviews

The Zyprexa Papers

Jim Gottstein

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In 2009, Eli Lilly, the US pharma giant, was fined \$1.415bn for promoting its blockbuster drug Zyprexa off-label for unapproved uses - in children and elderly people. The company knew of the risks - Zyprexa is associated with serious metabolic problems (obesity, insulin resistance, diabetes). On December 17, 2006, the journalist Alex Berenson, broke this story in *The New York Times*: 'Eli Lilly said to play down risk of Top Pill'

"The drug maker Eli Lilly has engaged in a decade long effort to play down the health risks of Zyprexa, its best selling medication for schizophrenia, according to hundreds of internal Lilly documents and email messages among top company managers."

The documents were given to *The Times*, '...by a lawyer representing mentally ill patients...' That lawyer was Jim Gottstein, author of *The Zyprexa Papers* and Founder of the Law Project for Psychiatric Rights.

At the instigation of Alex Berenson, Jim Gottstein acquired and disseminated the Zyprexa Papers that clearly incriminated Lilly. His source was

a lawyer representing clients harmed by Zyprexa, and then bound to silence. Legally, these papers were protected by a Secrecy Order. Jim Gottstein firmly believed that he had disseminated them without contravening the terms of that legal constraint. Unsurprisingly, Lilly and their army of lawyers thought otherwise - and the meat of the story is the 'edge of your seat' legal battle that ensues.

The individual who embodies the human cost of drugs like Zyprexa and the systemic failures of 'mental health care' is one William S. (Bill) Baily. Broken by divorce and the loss of his children, disabled by some 70 hospitalisations over 3 decades and force drugged against his will - even though he had never been violent or suicidal.

The book reads like a docudrama, it's that vivid. Will Eli Lilly, the actual criminals, succeed in crushing Jim Gottstein, both professionally and financially? Can Jim Gottstein save Bill from being forced drugged by the Alaska Psychiatric Institute with 'poison' (Bill's word) that even the judge recognises does not deliver lasting benefits?

As a narrative, *The Zyprexa Papers* works on two intertwined levels - the dubious ethics of legal process meshed with the individual human rights of those in the 'mental health' system. The issues it raises will resonate in your own moral conscience long after you have read the last page.

Harriet Vogt