

## **Experience of forced psychiatric drugging and electroshock**

*By NN, man 45, Norway*

I used to be a mostly happy artist with a bachelor in fine arts. In the spring of 2006, after a hurtful breakup, I suffered a nervous breakdown. I experienced intense grief and insomnia. Within a few weeks I was subjected to psychiatric commitment and forced treatment for the first time.

I was put on a cocktail of psychotropic drugs. I have experienced physical effects like heart arrhythmia, reduced breathing, reduced muscle control, neurological damage and hormonal disturbances. Being overmedicated felt like my nervous system was about to explode. My co-patients asked:

"What are they doing to you?"

I obviously looked tormented.

Later the psychiatrist gave me close to 30 electroshocks. I was never informed of the risks. I felt un-free to refuse this treatment and manipulated into giving my consent. I was heavily drugged, and that influenced my ability to make decisions. If I had known at the time all the risks of ECT I would not have consented. When I realized how much I had been damaged, I wanted to leave the hospital. I was very angry inside, because I now felt my cognitive skills were severely impaired. My memory was heavily affected and I had lost parts of my life history as well as my ability to execute my profession as an artist.

I do not recognize the person I have become. The forced treatments have ruined my sense of personality and identity. My life has been horrible since then. But starting in 2010 I felt a bit better. I was un-medicated for a long period of time and filled my life with healthy food, activities and alternative therapies. However, I still suffered from the long-term effects of the former psychiatric interventions. My now-ascetic lifestyle was in part motivated by the iatrogenic damage I suffered at the hands of the psychiatric system. But it was also a protest against the consumption-based lifestyle of our times. This resulted in a new diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia. I could not believe it.

From 2013 until today I have once again experienced a series of forced psychiatric treatments. I felt my behavior in the ward was "normal" and "sane". Yet, in violation of my personal agency they started drugging me with Zyprexa. The antipsychotic drugs make me passive and numb like a zombie. I am losing the ability to think and feel, so I function in a very shallow way. It feels like the pills suffocate my soul. I feel dead inside. It is scary. It is as if my personality disappears. I wonder, will I ever regain my sense of self? If not, I feel that my life is pointless. Living soulless is meaningless. I wish I could find a way out of this vacuum.

After all the painful experiences in psychiatry since 2006, it hurts just to be. An indescribable emptiness takes up almost all the space. It is like being shut out of real life. As a living dead I walk around. No feelings. Few thoughts. It was not like this before. It is as if someone has chemically excluded me from my surroundings and my own inner life. It is unbearable. I have a daughter that is 21 years old. It is hard when she describes me as distant, only sitting in a chair, staring absently into the air.

I feel mistreated, that I should never have been submitted to forced treatment. The whole thing was wrong from the beginning to the end. After the first commitment in 2006 I felt very angry about what they did to me, but by now I have almost lost my ability to even feel this constructive anger. I have not given up of course, but my life-force and vitality are very low. I am maybe not the fighter I used to be, but there is still something inside me that wants to fight for my life.

I have been trying to challenge my forced outpatient commitment for over a year. I have been through two court cases and all the way to the Supreme Court, where my final appeal was denied. However, less than one month after this denial the psychiatrist suddenly decided to take me off forced outpatient commitment, just like that. But even if I have not been subjected to forced treatment the last month, I do not feel relaxed and free. If they find my behavior strange, they can just use force against me again. They still have all the power and I can't escape from that. I feel broken.

As a consequence of institutionalization and infringements of my personal integrity I have become socially isolated. I have been ripped out of my social setting, away from my family and friends. I have lost the sense of belonging. I have lost academic and social skills. I have simply become alone and lonely.

It is as if 9 years of my life have disappeared. It is very traumatic. I wish I could suppress it and move on. But someone else has taken control over my life. I love freedom and independence. Now I find myself totally depended on the social security system with a constant threat of coercion hanging over me. One flick of the pen and I am once again deprived of my liberty and forced to take psychotropic drugs. I cannot live like this anymore. It is torture.