

Chronic Depression Disappears with Placebo



By Joe Dispenza, D.C.

JANIS SCHONFELD, a 46-year-old interior designer living in California, had suffered with depression since she was a teenager. She'd never sought help with the condition until she saw a newspaper ad in 1997. The UCLA Neuropsychiatric Institute was looking for volunteer subjects for a drug trial to test a new antidepressant called venlafaxine (Effexor). Schonfeld, a wife and mother—whose depression had escalated to the point where she had actually entertained thoughts of suicide—jumped at the chance to be part of the trial. When Schonfeld arrived at the institute for the first time, a technician hooked her up to an electroencephalograph (EEG) to monitor and record her brain-wave activity for about 45 minutes, and not long after that, Schonfeld left with a bottle of pills from the hospital pharmacy. She knew that roughly half of the group of 51 subjects would be getting the drug, and half would receive a placebo, although neither she nor the doctors conducting the study had any idea which group she had been randomly assigned to. In fact, no one would know until the study was over. But at the time, that hardly mattered to Schonfeld. She was excited and hopeful that after decades of battling clinical depression, a condition that would cause her to sometimes suddenly burst into tears for no apparent reason, she might finally be getting help.

Schonfeld agreed to return every week for the entire eight weeks of the study. On each occasion, she'd answer

questions about how she was feeling, and several times, she sat through yet another EEG. Not long after she started taking her pills, Schonfeld began feeling dramatically better for the first time in her life. Ironically, she also felt nauseated, but that was good news because she knew that nausea was one of the common side effects of the drug being tested. She thought that she surely must have gotten the active drug if her depression was lifting and she was also experiencing side effects. Even the nurse she spoke to when she returned every week was convinced Schonfeld must be getting the real thing because of the changes she was experiencing.

Finally, at the end of the eight-week study, one of the researchers revealed the shocking truth: Schonfeld, who was no longer suicidal and felt like a new person after taking the pills, had actually been in the placebo group. Schonfeld was floored. She was sure the doctor had made a mistake. She simply didn't believe that she could have felt so much better after so many years of suffocating depression simply from taking a bottle of sugar pills. And she'd even gotten the side effects! There must have been a mix-up. She asked the doctor to check the records again. He laughed good-naturedly as he assured her that the bottle she had taken home with her, the bottle that had given Schonfeld her life back, indeed contained nothing but placebo pills.

As she sat there in shock, the doctor insisted that just because she hadn't been getting any real medication, it

didn't mean that she had been imagining her depressive symptoms or her improvement; it only meant that whatever had made her feel better wasn't due to Effexor.

And she wasn't the only one: The study results would soon show that 38 percent of the placebo group felt better, compared to 52 percent of the group who received Effexor. But when the rest of the data came out, it was the researchers' turn to be surprised: The patients like Schonfeld, who had improved on the placebos, hadn't just imagined feeling better; they had actually changed their brain-wave patterns. The EEG recordings taken so faithfully over the course of the study showed a significant increase in activity in the prefrontal cortex, which in depressed patients typically has very low activity.

Thus the placebo effect was not only altering Schonfeld's mind, but also bringing about real physical changes in her biology. In other words, it wasn't just in her mind; it was in her brain. She wasn't just feeling well—she was well. Schonfeld literally had a different brain by the end of the study, without taking any drug or doing anything differently. It was her mind that had changed her body. More than a dozen years later, Schonfeld still felt much improved.

How is it possible that a sugar pill could not only lift the symptoms of deep-seated depression, but also cause bona fide side effects like nausea? And what does it mean that the same inert substance actually has the power to change how brain waves fire, increasing activity in the very part of the brain most affected by depression? Can the subjective mind really create those kinds of measurable objective physiological changes? What's going on in the mind and in the body that would allow a placebo to so perfectly mimic a real drug in this way? Could the same phenomenal healing effect occur not only with chronic mental illness, but also with a life-threatening condition such as cancer? Δ

This excerpt, originally titled "Chronic Depression Magically Lifts," is reprinted by permission from the new book *You Are the Placebo* by Joe Dispenza, D.C., which is published by Hay House (Available April 29, 2014) and available at all bookstores or online at: www.hayhouse.com.

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Russia, GMOs, and Organic Food

Jeffrey Smith, founder of the Institute for Responsible Technology, writes that Russia's prime minister, Dmitry Medvedev, announced that the country will not import genetically modified food.

Medvedev ordered widespread monitoring of the agricultural sector, saying that despite rather strict restrictions, a certain amount of GMO products have made it to the Russian market. Agriculture Minister Nikolay Fyodorov agreed, and stated that Russia should remain free of genetically modified products. In February 2014, the Russian parliament asked the government to impose a temporary ban on all genetically altered products in Russia. Deputy Agriculture Minister Aleksandr Petrikov cited reasons the Agriculture Minister supports the parliament: "Lack of research into the various effects of GMO cultures, the absence of a working monitoring system, and the fact that spreading of GMO crops could harm the biodiversity in whole regions." He said that hasty introduction of GMO cultures "carries economic risks," but Russia can present itself as a producer of high-quality, GMO-free produce. The ministry supports a complete ban on use of genetically modified organisms.

Source: *Spilling the Beans* newsletter, April 2014, www.responsibletechnology.org and "Duma Seeks Moratorium on GMO Production in Russia," www.rt.com/politics/russian-duma-gmo-moratorium-804/.

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