

SANE ASYLUMS

THE SUCCESS OF HOMEOPATHY BEFORE PSYCHIATRY LOST ITS MIND

By Jerry M. Kantor

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If there was a system of medicine gentle on the body, mind, and spirit, safe for pregnant women, newborns, and people of all age groups and genders, which is non-invasive, non-addictive, and cost-effective, with no side effects, and that can address a full range of acute and chronic health conditions using eco-friendly and biodegradable medicines, then surely the public will want it, right?

Such a system of medicine exists, known as homeopathy, founded 250 years ago by Dr Samuel Hahnemann, MD, a German medical doctor.

However, homeopathy is a sweet pill that is hard to swallow for most people. This is partly due to homeopathy being fairly esoteric in its philosophy, as well as ahead of its time, and also because of the strongly negative portrayal of it in the mass media. Thankfully the gross misconceptions about homeopathy can be overcome by learning about its history.

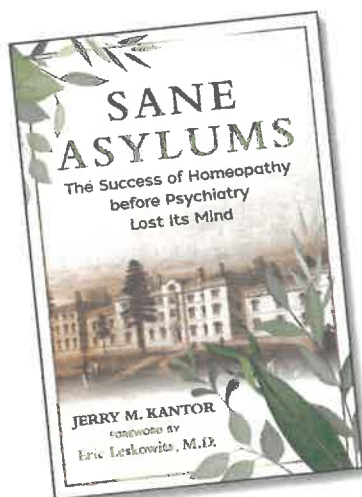
In the new book *Sane Asylums: The Success of Homeopathy before Psychiatry Lost Its Mind*, author Jerry M. Kantor presents copious verifiable information focused on a hero we can root for and a heroine we can relate to, alongside snippets about a slice of time (1875–1925) when the stars of homeopathy were ascending.

Taking you on a fascinating stroll through medical history, Kantor shows how in the late 1800s visionary medical doctors were treating mental illness with gentle and effective homeopathic remedies and achieving success rates far superior to current drug-based treatment modalities. Homeopathy as a treatment option had just emerged after an era when the insane were known as beasts, or as people possessed, sinners, ill, defective, tortured souls, and troublemakers.

These crude perceptions changed, and homeopathy offered an enlight-

ened mental-healthcare method, a practice set in motion by the founder of homeopathy, Dr Hahnemann, MD, in 1792 when he took charge of an asylum for the insane and cured a very important patient, Herr Klockenbring, a police chief.

Kantor also shares the story of the madness of Mary Todd Lincoln, President Abraham Lincoln's widow, and her treatment by homeopath Dr Richard J.



ABOVE: Middletown State Homeopathic Hospital, early 1900s.

Patterson, MD, revealing that in a mere three months of homeopathic treatment, Mary began to live a normal life.

The true focus of *Sane Asylums* is Dr Selden Talcott, MD, who emerges as a hero. After serving in the US Civil War, he moved on to direct Middletown State Homeopathic Hospital from 1877 to 1902. He also wrote *Mental Diseases and Their Modern Treatment*, the very first systematic book about asylum-based homeopathic care, including the integration of sports (baseball) into the armamentarium of psychiatry. As the superintendent of Middletown asylum, Dr Talcott had a clear mission:

- ★ Combine the philosophy of homeopathy, as described in the *Organon of the Medical Art* by Samuel Hahnemann, with the indi-

vidualised homeopathic method of handling the mentally ill

- ★ Demonstrate the efficacy of homeopathy
- ★ Create a culturally and recreationally enriching, self-sustaining, farm-operating hospital
- ★ Provide occupational therapy for the mentally ill
- ★ Provide a sanctuary for the incurably mentally ill
- ★ Include forward-looking scientific-medical research into patient care

As a leader, Dr Talcott provided training to scores of medical doctors across the United States and founded satellite asylums that treated hundreds and thousands of mentally ill patients. All these asylums followed the treatment plan that Dr Talcott had envisioned.

The medical team at Middletown also worked seamlessly with Dr Clara Barrus, MD, chief educator for the nurses, who wrote a medical masterpiece, *Nursing the Insane*. She practiced and taught her students kindness and gentle discipline, rest for physical and mental recuperation, massage, enforced protection when necessary, healthy diet, exercise, amusement, occupation, moral and physical hygiene, and finally, individualised homeopathic care.

In chapter 7 of *Sane Asylums*, Kantor shares enlightening extracts from Barrus' book, showing that treatment of the insane at Middletown was based on a holistic model, did not in

the least lean toward profiteering, and was not an industrial method of giving the insane a disease label and pushing toxic pills down their unwilling throats.

In chapter 8, Kantor describes in detail how such sane treatment of the insane included the quintessential American sport of baseball. Dr Talcott revolutionised the care of his patients by observing they were totally riveted by watching baseball games. So he formed baseball teams comprising his patients. These teams played and won several games. These accomplishments enhanced the patients' physical prowess, self-esteem and team spirit, helping them recover their sanity beautifully. It was the first time a medical treatment plan included a prescription for sports!

Yet, as the author illustrates, after ascending to a peak of success, the stars of homeopathic insane asylums began to fade in the 20th century. The utopian homeopathic insane asylums morphed into conventional hospitals, clinics, and research centres, as patented and profitable pharmaceutical medicine, drug marketing, and Freudian psychotherapy entered the scene.

These shifts were strongly backed by top industrialists of that era who joined forces to promote medicine based on the 20th-century materialist-mechanical scientific model. The spiritually aligned health and humane treatment that constituted

the backbone of Talcott and Barrus's handling of the insane was no longer considered scientific. Allopathic practitioners began relying on medication, electric shock, and surgeries to handle the insane.

Though drug-based psychiatry is the go-to in our modern times, the author gives a very brief case of a schoolgirl from his own practice and shows how despite all odds he successfully treated her exhibitionism using a well-known homeopathic remedy – *Kali carbonicum* – chosen on the basis of homeopathic principles and the laws of individualisation. As a result, without taking any pharmaceuticals, the child completely recovered from her insanity and stopped disrobing in school.

Readers of *Sane Asylums* also learn about the author's dream – of a sane world in which people with mental illness are treated in fully integrative asylums with homeopathy included in the comprehensive healthcare armamentarium. In this dream world, the insane are treated as people instead of someone mad. In this reviewer's opinion, this dream can come true when,

as a society, we move forward to invest in sanity.

This hard-to-put-down book concludes with a rich and informative set of appendices including research by Dr Iris Bell, MD on how homeopathic remedies work. A brief section brings up relevant aphorisms on mental health by Dr Hahnemann, showing that he thought hard and deep about mental health 250 years ago and discovered a method for treating afflicted people humanely and counted on the patient's innate capacity to recover their sanity when stimulated with gentle and individualised homeopathic remedies.

Offering a fresh perspective on the problem of mental health, along with sane solutions, *Sane Asylums* brilliantly reveals that when modern psychiatry was in its earliest formative stages, homeopathy was way ahead of its time in caring for the insane.

– Vatsala Sperling, PhD



ABOVE: Dr Talcott organised patient baseball teams. This photo is circa 1889, and the team name was *Asylum!*

