

Resources for Extraordinary Healing: Schizophrenia, Bipolar, and Other Serious Mental Illnesses

Emma Bragdon

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"This resource book is for people touched by serious mental illness in themselves or their loved ones and the health providers wanting to know more about resources for integrative models of effective care." Dr. Emma Bragdon is a psychologist who has allied herself with the spiritist movement whose psychic healing techniques are best known in Brazil.

Bragdon's primary theme is that mental illness is on the rise, yet there seems to be little promise of a cure from conventional medical sources. At this time, schizophrenia, bipolar, and other mental ailments are treated with medications that may offer relief to some; for others, there may be distressing side effects that exacerbate symptoms. Quoting her own previous work, Bragdon states that "in 2009, one out of eight adults in the US was taking psychiatric medication" and believes that the increasing number of people disabled by mental illness is "an indictment of contemporary biomedical psychiatry."

Bragdon draws from a number of sources including her fellow spiritists, some of whom credit her with introducing them to the movement. Thus there is little sense of checks and balances in what is written about spiritist methods of treatment. Many anecdotal attestations are presented touting the healing work of the Brazilian "John of God" (João Teixeira de Faria), whose "psychic surgeries" have come under criticism from scientific examiners and investigative journalists as highly questionable at best. Bragdon's book presents John of God in a very positive light, implying that his cures, when they happen, are often both quick and permanent. In the spiritual hospitals of Brazil, people suffering from physical and mental diseases come to be healed by mediumistic interventions, laying-on of hands, and invisible surgery.

Other alternative treatments for the mentally ill have been shown to be effective because they feature techniques to reduce dependence on psychotropic medicines, with an intense level of interaction with the patient. Some examples given include the CooperRiis community in North Carolina, where patients and medical professionals live together in a therapeutic farming environment. CooperRiis is not connected with the spiritist movement, nor is the international Soteria movement, offering gentle in-patient treatment for schizophrenia, or the American Residential Treatment Association "safe homes" for the mentally ill. These institutions emphasize lowered medication levels or total withdrawal, a homelike environment, and intense patient commitment. By including these choices, Bragdon paints a broad picture of integrative help available to the mentally ill beyond the spiritist template. Also included are reiki, flower healing, karma therapy, acupuncture, and bioenergy. Useful appendices list contacts for techniques and communities mentioned in the book.

The message of *Resources for Extraordinary Healing*: choose carefully. Some mentally ill persons may be cured to their satisfaction by visiting a psychic, clairvoyant, or other unconventional healer, and those who are weary of standard treatment options may feel drawn to such alternatives. But others may have justifiable suspicions about spiritism and related "miracle cures," and seek programs that offer the development of internal discipline and a slow

readjustment to functional living in a caring environment. Bragdon displays a bias towards the spiritist approach, but she has given the reader a wide variety of helpful resources from which to choose.

BARBARA BAMBERGER SCOTT (September 10, 2012)

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