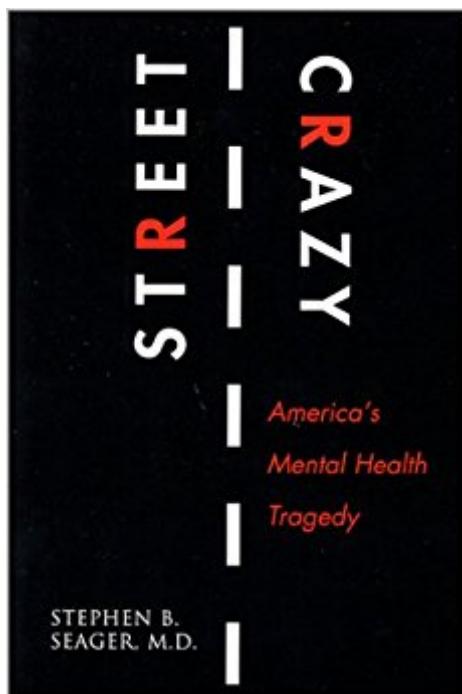


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Street Crazy : America's Mental Health Tragedy



Synopsis

STREET CRAZY recounts one psychiatrist's experience with the mentally ill, who have often become homeless because of their disease. Using clear, straight-forward language, Dr. Stephen B. Seager explains brain disease, tells the often disturbing history of the mentally ill, and shows how, through a series of well-meaning legal mishaps, our most vulnerable citizens have been abandoned to the streets. By following Dr. Seager as he unravels the mystery behind John Doe, a sick young man brought to the hospital by the police, the reader will come to understand the degradation and suffering of the chronically mentally ill and their families, as well as the frustration and confusion experienced by those most intimately involved with caring for the homeless mentally ill. Finally, the author suggests some real action that we, as U.S. citizens, can take to solve this morally untenable but seemingly insurmountable dilemma.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Fantastic! The movement to improve the plight of the homeless mentally ill has found a clear voice. STREET CRAZY will be the equivalent of Ralph Nader's *Unsafe at Any Speed* or Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. Mental illness profoundly affects most of us, often through the sad story of a sick relative or friend, and if you've ever wondered what was happening, this book will answer your questions simply and clearly. I can't recommend STREET CRAZY highly enough." Carla Jacobs, Board of Directors for NAMI -- National Alliance for the Mentally Ill "Fantastic! The plight of the homeless mentally ill has found a clear voice." -- Carla Jacobs, Former Board Member, National

Alliance for the Mentally Ill

Dr. Stephen B. Seager worked as a public sector psychiatrist in Los Angeles County for nine years. He is an assistant professor of psychiatry at the UCLA School of Medicine. Currently, he divides his time between writing and practicing psychiatry. He lives in Torrance, California. Street Crazy is his fourth book.

Like all of Dr. Seager's books this is very informative and an easy read. I remember the havoc that occurred in Washington state when many mentally impaired individuals were sent out to live on the streets. This increased the numbers of homeless people and in the mix were some who were criminals or potential criminals. Turning patients out into a society that cannot care for, or legally deal with, is not morally, or ethically right. To do so because of budgetary issues is not acceptable.

I come from the outpatient side of the mental health field, as a licensed social worker rather than a physician who worked largely with the homeless for six years. There is a treatment resistant core group of extremely mentally ill homeless people for which again and again, my co-workers and I struggled to find solutions. There are some new modalities starting that show promise, such as the housing first model and the idea of using motivational interviewing and Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) teams to get out on the streets and engage over and over again until the clients "come in", but the stories the author portrays are heartbreakingly common in the world of caretakers for the homeless mentally ill. The book is not a prescriptive, and I think its target audience is not so much current professionals but policy makers and laymen who have a stake in "cleaning up the streets". Understanding the problem helps substantially in fixing it, and Dr. Seager's delineation of the limitations of the mental health field's ability to fix the problem alone is spot on. I highly recommend this book for anyone getting ready to work in the field of inpatient mental health, community mental health, or homeless services.

I really enjoyed reading his story. He explained the history regarding the stigma of mental illness. He gave the reader a good understanding of the tragedies that occur every day and how our mental health and legal systems are horribly not working to care for the ill. I recommend this book.

As a psychiatrist reading this book, I have mixed feelings about it. The book is at its best when Dr. Seager explores the mental health care history and current system, explaining why things work (or

don't) and what can be done to change the system. The melodramatic, bombastic writing gets in the way. The patient stories seem picked for shock value, and while it is effective for layman readers, it is tedious. I was hoping for more systems information and discussion about change. I also didn't see a disclaimer that patient names were changed; I hope they were, as it seems opportunistic if they were not. Some of the medication references are off (Neurontin is not used as monotherapy in bipolar disorder), but this was written seven years ago, so he deserves some slack. It's an interesting read and would have been much better had it been more about the American Mental Health Tragedy and less about Dr. Seager's countertransference, family issues, and titillating case stories.

Does anybody know if this book is supposed to be fiction or non-fiction? Is there such a place as "The Mill" in LA? Did a homeless man actually die in his hot tub? I'm guessing fiction based on real life characters, but wish the author told us.

Awesome book. Great price

Dr. Seager explains graphically and passionately what those of us who have dealt with the homeless mentally ill have known for years; the current system is neither humane nor effective. His chronicles of his real life patients show how the current system, which places patients' personal freedoms and rights over their own safety and the safety of the community, is creating a dangerous subculture of homeless mentally ill whose only option to a night on the streets is a night in jail. He opens the controversial debate pitting moral and ethical laws against Constitutional law, and tries to strike the delicate balance between the two. Bravo to Dr. Seager from a career peace officer and current Police Chief. We need to have this discussion especially as California's mental health laws are up for review this year.

Although this book is often melodramatic to some, it is truth, nevertheless. If one is looking for helpful ideas, begin with Chapter ten and see the history of obstacles. Don't expect psychiatrist, counsellors and case managers to offer much help. Their hands are tied to laws discussed in the DSM IV. Some complain that others are not doing a good enough job. Many have not lived it. After this book begin with the introduction of "Understanding Depression: What We Know and What You Can Do About" by J. Raymond DePaulo Jr. It states that the advocacy for the mentally ill will come from family and friends. I talk from experience. Many of us, recovering homeless mentally ill find it a challenge to

even fill out the paperwork to get help. Try filling out an application for SSDI: and then get turned down. Chapter ten of this book gets to the heart of the matter. The Churches has also failed us completely. When I recover from a physical problem, I will spend the rest of my life writing about this problem and helpful ideas. I have a chapter called Gaps in the System. A major problem is research money. Heart research gets 25% and mental health gets a mere 4% and this includes alzheimer's disease. The lobbyist push drugs but this is not the complete answer. Mad in America: Bad Science, Bad Medicine, by Robert Whitaker is another book. The real problem is the stigma attached to mental illness. Case managers and social workers help only a little. It is a miracle that any of us survive.

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