A WORD ABOUT MEDICATIONS

An impressive amount of research over the last 40 years has been devoted to the discovery, development, and research of medication that can help with mood, behavior, and other emotional difficulties. Medications often are most helpful in combination with therapy and other efforts at self-help.

The vast majority of psychotropic medications are not habit-forming, and students can always decide, with consultation, to stop taking them. It might be unwise not to consider medications that can make an enormous contribution to well-being, just as it would be unwise to consider medication the only or best option for everyone. The meaning of taking medication, and of taking a particular medication, is an important aspect to keep in mind.

Know that it is important for the health providers to be selective when deciding who is an appropriate candidate for medication, as well as which medication and at which dosage. Sometimes medications take some days or weeks to start working.

Many of the newer medications offer significant advances in effectiveness, often combined with fewer side-effects. The balance between desired effects and possible undesired effects (“side-effects”) should be assessed by the student, in consultation with the prescribing clinician. Fortunately, many choices exist and can be discussed.

Medications are not “quick fixes” for longer-standing problems. They do not offer the opportunity to feel better without regard to the underlying psychological and social factors. They are not, for instance, a treatment for bad days or problems with intimacy. They do not change who someone is as a person. While there may be some disappointment as a result, this can often be reassuring for a student to know. A concern may be that if medications are helpful, they must be correcting some biochemical abnormality that is the sole cause of the problem.

As human beings, the interaction of our physical selves with our emotional and spiritual selves, along with our interactions with the environments, makes our reaction to medication much more complex. Thus, it is important for us to take into account the major aspects of our lives that contribute to our state of being.