

CRD SEMINAR

Professor Irving Kirsch

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*Irving Kirsch is Associate Director of the Program in Placebo Studies and the Therapeutic Encounter at the Harvard Medical School and Professor Emeritus at the University of Hull and the University of Connecticut. He has published 10 books and more than 200 scientific journal articles and book chapters on placebo effects, antidepressant medication, hypnosis, and suggestion. His meta-analyses on the efficacy of antidepressants were covered extensively in the international media and influenced official guidelines for the treatment of depression in the United Kingdom. His book, *The Emperor's New Drugs: Exploding the Antidepressant Myth*, was published in the UK by The Bodley Head, a division of Random House, and by Basic Books in the US. It has also been published in Japanese and French, and a Polish edition is currently in press.*

Wednesday 6 April 2011

13:30 – 14:30

ARRC Auditorium

Antidepressant Medication: The Emperor's New Drugs

Depression is widely portrayed as the result of a chemical imbalance in the brain, most commonly thought to involve a deficiency in serotonin or other neurotransmitters. The primary evidence for the chemical imbalance theory is the supposed effectiveness of antidepressants in the treatment of depression. However, approximately half of the clinical trials of antidepressants fail to show significant drug-placebo differences, and most of these negative trials were never published. When all of the data are analyzed, the difference between drug and placebo is not clinically significant. Even the small statistical difference between antidepressants and placebos may not be a true drug effect; instead, it may be an enhanced placebo effect, brought about by the fact that most patients and doctors in clinical trials successfully break blind. The serotonin theory is as close to any theory in the history of science to having been proved wrong. Some antidepressants are supposed to increase serotonin, some are not supposed to affect it at all, and there is even an antidepressant that is supposed decrease serotonin, yet they all produce identical response rates. When the effect of a medical treatment is independent of its chemical composition, we have prima facie evidence that it is a placebo.

All welcome!