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!