

Who Killed Japanese Culture?

I've just finished reading a fascinating article from 2004. It was written by Kathryn Schulz and featured in the New York Times.

Kathryn describes in great detail how pharmaceutical companies targeted Japanese citizens with an angle based on their cultural beliefs rather than science.

Largely before 1999 Japanese citizens were, it seems, oblivious to the world of antidepressants, depression was rarely discussed, due, in part, to the cultural belief system.

Around 1999 pharmaceutical companies and their genius marketing teams used a ploy that only they could get away with. An all out attack that defies belief [at least it would have once, until I started writing about pharma]

"Your soul has a cold" [Kokoro no Kaze] was the catchy terminology pharmaceutical companies used to warn Japanese citizens that mild depression can be cured by prescription drugs.

For years the Japanese people showed great courtesy [they still do to this day] by wearing surgical masks when they caught the common cold. One only has to watch news footage of Japan to witness a passer-by adorning a mask. These are pretty common-place in Japan and have been for a long time.

Japan is a nation of politeness. "Kokoro no Kaze" appears to be aimed at the very hearts of Japanese people. It's a foot in the door for the likes of companies such as GlaxoSmithKline pushing Paxil on an unsuspecting nation. Japanese pharmaceutical bosses seem to be a breed apart from other citizens of Japan. Somewhere along the line, they have been indoctrinated by the power of pharma marketing and they either believe the hype or they are in denial to merely secure a financial future for their families. Morals, it would appear, have been stripped and money-making has overpowered them. Maybe the CEO's of pharmaceutical companies in Japan need to embrace the phrase that Japan prides itself on, "The nail that sticks up gets hammered down."

Before pharma invaded the Japanese culture, terms such as 'depression' [utsubyo] were rarely heard. "Kokoro

no Kaze" changed that.

From 1999 pharma publicized mild depression in Japan, the majority of citizens never even knew [utsubyo] existed let alone there being a 'cure' for it.

With pharma money and a goal of antidepressant medication, they launched this campaign to Japanese folk who up until then had inadequately addressed serious mental health conditions. Depression was tarred with the same brush as schizophrenia and treatment was available almost solely in mental institutions. 'Mild depression' did not exist, it was never a problem. The problem only occurred when the campaign was launched... "Your soul has a cold."

Up until 2004, 5 years after pharma launched their campaign in Japan, 177 books had been published about depression. Only 27 books about depression were published before the "Your soul has a cold" campaign. Depression-related doctor visits in Japan increased 46 percent from 1999 to 2003.[1]

Japan, was, and still is in some quarters, a nation that based their beliefs on energies. Pharma changed that along with the media. To play on the minds of cultural beliefs is a genius tactic. To turn a runny nose into one's vital energy leaking should receive an award, if only for 'The Best Award for Deception' category.

Buddhism encourages the acceptance of sadness and I guess if pharma had their way, an advertising campaign with Buddha sitting holding a packet of antidepressants would have been a road to go down. But pharma know they cannot be so blatant. "Kokoro no Kaze" was created, I believe, to chip away at the cultural beliefs that have made Japan a great country, it's a form of brainwashing rather than creating awareness.

Japan was largely ignored by pharmaceutical companies, how could they sell a product to a nation who accepted sadness into their lives and dealt with it in their own way? In the eighties Eli Lilly decided against selling Prozac in Japan after market research revealed there was virtually no demand for antidepressants. So why the U-Turn?

Greed.

On the 7th April 1999 the Japanese Ministry of Health and Welfare approved Luvox® and Depromel® (both

brand names contain the active ingredient: fluvoxamine) for marketing in Japan. It was co-developed by Solvay-Meiji and Meiji Seika. Solvay-Meiji is a joint venture of Solvay SA and Meiji Seika. The marketing around this time was to run in conjunction with the phrase "Kokoro no Kaze" or "Your soul has a cold".

The Solvay press office[2] ran with such spin as:

"Being an SSRI, it inhibits the re-uptake of serotonin, a substance in the brain that plays an important role in mental health disorders like depression and OCD"

and

"Experts believe that depression is underrecognized in Japan."

Solvay threw in the clincher with:

"Like in many other countries mental illness is often considered to be profoundly stigmatizing, not just to patients but also to their families. Depression and obsessive-compulsive disorders are complicated diagnoses to make with many patients going unrecognized."

A great way to target a nation who had kept everything behind the privacy of their own closed doors for decades. An illness that up until the launch of drugs that was never even recognized in Japan.

A year later, pharmaceutical big boys, GlaxoSmithKline, launched Paxil into the lives of this once peaceful nation.

Koji Nakagawa, GlaxoSmithKline's product manager for Paxil, explained:

"When other pharmaceutical companies were giving up on developing antidepressants in Japan, we went ahead for a very simple reason: the successful marketing in the United States and Europe." [3]

As Nakagawa put it: "People didn't know they were suffering from a disease. We felt it was important to reach out to them."

So, GlaxoSmithKline reached out with:

"Depression is a disease that anyone can get. It can be cured by medicine. Early detection is important."

Paxil-pushing Glaxo reps visit selected doctors an average of twice a week. Awareness campaigns taught doctor's and the public to recognize the following symptoms of depression (the translation is the GSK's):

"Head feels heavy, cannot sleep, stiff shoulders, backache, tired and lazy, no appetite, not intrigued, feel depressed."

Psychiatrist Yutaka Ono applauds raising awareness about depression, but GlaxoSmithKline's marketing made him uncomfortable:

"They ran a very intense campaign about mild depression where a beautiful young lady comes out all smiles and says, 'I went to a doctor and now I'm happy.' You know, depression is not that easy. And if it is that easy, it might not be depression."

Between 1998 and 2003, writes Kathryn Schulz, sales of antidepressants in Japan quintupled.[4]

GlaxoSmithKline saw its sales of Paxil increase from \$108 million in 2001 to \$298 million in 2003. According to the company, during one seven-month ad campaign it ran last year, 110,000 people in a population of 127 million consulted their doctors about depression.

It's quite clear, to me anyhow, to see how Japan has become infested with this plague, the pharma plague. They just could not leave them alone could they? They had to breakdown the cultural beliefs and throw a rather large spanner into the nation of courteousness.

On the 28th June, 2007, Bloomberg ran with the headline, 'Japan Says Suicidal Cases Rise Among Paxil Users' - The power of foresight huh?

GlaxoSmithKline, continue to push Paxil in Japan. The current Paxil NCT00812812 trial is evidence of that.

Pharma won't be happy with Japan, they will want more. If life elsewhere really does exist then I really fear for our alien friends looking down on us from the Universe. If companies like Glaxo and Solvay can spoil the lifestyles of the Japanese they will probably want to fund NASA's SETI program[5] just so they can get the first crack at whatever or whomever NASA may find.

The only "soul with a cold" is that of pharmaceutical companies and marketing teams...assuming they have a soul?

Bob Fiddaman

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[1] [IMS Health, a company that tracks global health care and pharmaceutical information.](#)

[2] <http://www.solvaypress.com/pressreleases/0,,950-2-0,00.htm>

[3] [Did Antidepressants Depress Japan? \[NYT\]](#)

[4] [IMS Health, a company that tracks global health care and pharmaceutical information.](#)

[5] [Search for Extra Terrestrial Intelligence](#)

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