

# Manifesto of a Noncompliant Mental Patient - Aubrey Ellen Shomo

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drugs

advocacy, rights & politics

rants

visions & voices

## The Manifesto of a Noncompliant Mental Patient

By Aubrey Ellen Shomo

I see it everywhere: People with mental illness need medication. It sounds reasonable. Today, there are even political organizations that seek to make it easy to force a person to take it. It's easy to look at another and assume things like that. It's human. After all, it's compassionate to help someone who isn't able to ask for help, right? They'll thank you in the long run, won't they?

No one asks why their child, or sibling or friend refuses to take their meds. Why bother? It's an illness. It's meaningless. The doctors say so. They know these things.

Have you ever questioned the logic of the phrase "She wouldn't be refusing medication if she wasn't ill"?

I am a noncompliant mental patient. I have been for years. I beg you. Ask why.

Look into my eyes and see me. Try to understand where I'm coming from. Even a crazy person has a human will.

I am someone's sibling, someone's child, and someone's friend. I could be yours.

I've been told more times than I can count that I won't make it without medication. I've been told that I have a chemical imbalance. My brain's broken. I need it.

If I refuse, it's the side effects. They can treat them with more medication. If it isn't that I lack insight. I don't know I'm sick.

Why would I possibly want to stop? How could I wish to do so? Let me ask you: Have you ever taken these drugs?

They call it anti-psychotic medication. It sounds good enough, but did you know these drugs are also called major tranquilizers?

They speak of side effects, but do you know what it feels like to have them? Can you read that on the label? On my label?

What's that? You learned all about this in medical school?

Can you learn what it is to be in love from reading a medical description? Heart rate, neurotransmitters, behavior patterns. Three criteria out of five.

Can human experience be described in such simple terms? I bet you don't think yours can. Why, then, do you insist on describing mine?

I know how major tranquilizers feel. I've had to.

They change a person. The vigor of human experience fades to shades of gray. Life becomes dull, boring, long. Creativity slips into nothingness. The very human spirit is dulled. You can go from the rapture of being alive to wondering if you even are.

They will make you calm. They will make you behave. They might even help with your problems, but they can dampen what really matters - what makes you alive. They majorly tranquilize.

"She prefers her mania - her madness. It's a symptom of the disease."

How can you say what matters to me? Is that your right?

For this broken mind of mine, I have been locked up. I have been threatened. I have been restrained. I have suffered at the hands of a system I'm told is helping me.

And they wonder why I don't trust them. How could I be hesitant, even bitter?

"She's paranoid. She won't take her medication."

They might be right, but all I ever wanted is to make my own choices. I've only wanted to scream, "What about how I feel?!"

I am a noncompliant mental patient. Hear my voice.

A cancer patient can refuse chemotherapy. A religious person can choose to trust God over penicillin. A doctor would call both irrational, but acquiesce. All I ask is the same right.

"She'll decompensate without it. It's the only thing keeping her even remotely sane."

I stopped all my medication twice. I was hoping once would be enough.

The first time, I failed. I lost it. They were right: I went crazy. I was strongly encouraged to take my meds. It was a fight I knew I would not win.

"Patient has been compliant - though hostile."

A façade of normalcy regained. High functioning. Working, going to school, socializing. All the things you're supposed to do. All so hollow. The spark was gone.

"The medication is effective."

But the drugs felt the same. So, I stopped again. Lots of people do.

"Compliance is a major problem in the treatment of mental illness."

I was told that I'd need medication forever. The facts spoke clearly. I was mentally ill. As long as I took my medication, I would be fine. Without it, I was doomed. Why did I want to stop?

I told them how it feels, but it didn't matter. I told them I would recover through force of will alone.

"Patient is grandiose."

So, I told them I didn't believe I was sick.

"Patient lacks insight."

In truth I was terrified. I believed I was insane, I had failed before, and I wasn't sure I could pull it off on my own. After all, the facts were clear - no one does.

But I did.

Later I learned that many have. No one talks about them.

John Nash never took medication again - it was key in his recovery. They left that out of the movie.

There are many others who were told no one recovers - told that they would be ill forever - but who proved them wrong.

I am a noncompliant mental patient, yet no one would try to hand me a pill today.

To get here, I had to ignore good medical advice. I had to have poor insight and bad judgment. Without it, I would never have achieved what I have in life.

So, now when I hear about family members who should have made sure their relatives were taking the medication, or courts that should have forced it, I think to myself about doctors who should have listened.

I often think about people who may have succeeded in stopping their medication, if only they

had the necessary support instead of assurances of failure. I wonder how many more I should be able to name.

I wonder why so few people speak of the validity of the desire to not be medicated. Even a crazy person has a human will.

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