

Breggin, P. R. (1995). Encephalitis lethargica. *The Journal of Neuropsychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences*, 7(3), 387.

Encephalitis Lethargica

SIR: There is a remarkable failure to cite and discuss relevant previous publications in Sarah Cheyette and Jeffrey Cummings's review, "Encephalitis Lethargica: Lessons for Contemporary Neuropsychiatry."¹ I covered the same ground in more detail in 1993 in "Parallels Between Neuroleptic Effects and Lethargic Encephalitis: The Production of Dyskinesias and Cognitive Disorders."² In more abbreviated form, I examined the issues in yet earlier publications as well.^{3,4}

Cheyette and Cummings leave out several of the most important lessons for "contemporary neuropsychiatry" that are examined in my 1993 publication.

First, lethargic encephalitis and the neuroleptics not only produce dyskinesias in common, but also psychoses (tardive psychosis) and

dementia (tardive dysmentia or dementia).

Second, in a most remarkable parallel, acute lethargic encephalitis is clinically indistinguishable from neuroleptic malignant syndrome.

Third, because of the above parallels, neuroleptic treatment can be viewed as very similar to the induction of a controlled (and sometimes out-of-control) viral encephalitis.

Fourth, because of the above parallels, including the common neuropathology, it should have been assumed at the start that neuroleptic treatment would lead to tardive dyskinesia, psychosis, and dementia. As I document in my 1993 review, Delay and Deniker, when introducing the use of neuroleptics in France, did in fact anticipate that the drug could produce an epidemic of neurological disorders similar to those associated with lethargic encephalitis.

Fifth, and in sharp contrast to Cheyette and Cummings's conclusions, the *absence* of any such associated neurological findings in various psychiatric disorders, such as schizophrenia and manic-depressive disorder, suggests that they do *not* originate in a common underlying neuropathology.

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References

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3. Breggin P: *Psychiatric Drugs: Hazards to the Brain*. New York, Springer, 1983
4. Breggin P: Brain damage, dementia, and persistent cognitive dysfunction associated with neuroleptic drugs: evidence, etiology, implications. *Journal of Mind and Behavior* 1990; 11:425-464