

## Remembering Abram Hoffer, PhD, MD

On April 26, 2015, I spoke briefly as a recovered patient-turned-author at the **Mental Health Regained** meeting after the 44th **Orthomolecular Medicine Today (OMT) Conference** at the Royal York Hotel in Toronto. I shared my recovery story and distributed free copies of my book –

*Remembering Abram Hoffer, PhD, MD  
by Reviewing His Books about  
Psychiatry, Biochemistry, Research and Clinical Practice.*

After orthomolecular medicine helped me recover from a bipolar disorder, in 1998, I became a volunteer with the Intl. Schizophrenia Foundation. The ISF sponsors the OMT conference, (alternating between Toronto and Vancouver).

From age 17 to 38, my episodes of depression, anxiety and hypomania went undiagnosed and untreated. For another 7 years, I was misdiagnosed and mistreated, lied to and laughed at - - by doctors. When I sought medical advice, something always went wrong. Without testing and without diagnosing properly, doctors prescribed medications which did not help. Ordinarily a sick patient is not left unwell for years or given medications that make the sick patient worse. Unfortunately, that happened to me. By interviewing at least 100 other patients, I learned that many patients have problems finding quality care.

By 1996, after 28 years of symptoms, episodes and problems, I was desperate to find help. One day, another patient suggested the *Journal of Orthomolecular Medicine*. That unusual word ‘ortho-molecular’ was hard for my depressed brain to understand – 6 syllables. Fortunately, even while unwell, I could still read. I learned that ‘ortho’ means ‘to correct’ and ‘molecular’ means ‘the chemistry’. Orthomolecular medicine uses optimum doses of vitamins and other nutritional supplements to restore patients’ health.

Encouraged by the idea of restorative care, I read several of Abram Hoffer’s books, applied his advice and recovered. Dr. Hoffer’s clearly-written information explained restorative treatment regimens, renewed my hope and saved my life. In 2002, I wrote *Finding Care for Depression* and a companion workbook *90-Day Plan for Finding Quality care* to pay it forward and help other patients navigate the mental healthcare maze. Dr. Hoffer kindly contributed a chapter called *How Orthomolecular Medicine Can Help*.

Starting in the 1950s in Saskatchewan, Doctors Abram Hoffer and Humphrey Osmond researched schizophrenia, developed safe and effective treatments and co-founded orthomolecular medicine as a restorative dimension of care. Their leading-edge research was remarkable 60 years ago and still useful today!

In the 1950s, treatments for mental illness were not very helpful. Many psychotic patients were simply warehoused in dreary asylums where they endured overcrowding, restraint, insulin comas and electric shocks. As a young psychiatrist, with a PhD in biochemistry, Abram Hoffer wanted to help those patients. He applied the life science of biochemistry when he considered what could impair brain function and cause psychosis and/or depression. At that time, at least four medical problems involving disorders of metabolism were known to cause mental symptoms – phenylketonuria, Hartnup disease, pellagra and syphilis. Pellagra, a nutritional deficiency, had been treated with nutrition and vitamins since 1939.

Hoffer and Osmond established a schizophrenia research team. They hoped to discover safe and effective treatments for psychosis and depression. Dr. Hoffer noticed that patients with schizophrenia experienced perceptual difficulties – they heard voices or sensed things not consistent with reality. Dr. Hoffer studied the medical literature and learned that various substances can cause hallucinations and psychosis.

While wearing his biochemist's 'hat', Dr. Hoffer noticed indole backbones in the chemical structures of hallucinogenic herbs and drugs. Hoffer and Osmond hypothesized that some psychotic patients produce internal indoles such as adrenochrome and adrenolutin, particularly when their bodies use an alternative metabolic pathway to dispose of excess adrenalin. When Hoffer's research team gave healthy people a low dose of adrenochrome to test the adrenochrome hypothesis, those people experienced an episode of psychosis.

As Hoffer and Osmond researched and developed their clinical practice, they asked psychotic patients to describe their perceptual symptoms. Based on patients' reports of perceptual problems during episodes of psychosis, they developed a multi-question HOD test to diagnose schizophrenia. Then they looked for disorders of metabolism as well as nutritional deficiencies, food sensitivities and other causes of psychosis and depression. They developed health-restoring regimens using optimum doses of vitamins B3 and C. They added other supplements as required – vitamins, minerals and amino acids. They adjusted patients' diets. A surprising number of patients recovered and resumed normal living. Some patients relapsed after stopping their treatments but recovered again when they resumed vitamin therapy.

Over Dr. Hoffer's lifetime, 'restorative' care was not provided by most psychiatrists so he wrote a series of books and hundreds of articles to educate the public. Restorative care for mental illness is still hard to find today. This means that Dr. Hoffer's books are still relevant and important.

In the 1998 film *Masks of Madness: Science of Healing*, Dr. Hoffer and six colleagues explained their practice of orthomolecular medicine. Also in the film, eight patients and one mother shared heartwarming recovery stories. That film presents the concept of restorative care and explains that optimum doses of vitamins, minerals & amino acids can complement other treatments *safely and effectively*. Of course each patient's treatment regimen has to be fine-tuned based on that patient's condition, diagnosis and response.

In the 1950s, Dr. Hoffer's double-blind placebo-controlled studies, the first ever done in psychiatry, found that 75% of acutely-ill psychotic patients can recover on a restorative treatment program. Mainstream psychiatry ignored Hoffer's published reports and dismissed orthomolecular treatments.

During his distinguished career as a biochemist, researcher and psychiatrist, Dr. Hoffer helped thousands of patients. As a consultant and an author, he wrote books, cases, articles and editorials to educate physicians and the public.

Orthomolecular regimens could help many more patients but few doctors know this. By the time Dr. Hoffer died in 2009, he had authored 36 books written so carefully that health professionals, patients and families can easily learn about orthomolecular medicine and restorative regimens.

My 2015 book, *Remembering Abram Hoffer by Reviewing his Books* encourages people to read Dr. Hoffer's many excellent books and learn how he researched schizophrenia and cooperated with other professionals as they developed safe, effective and restorative treatments.

Abram Hoffer wrote his first books in the 1960s. Those classic guides are still worth reading – available used from [amazon.com](http://amazon.com) or [abebooks.com](http://abebooks.com). For decades, Dr. Hoffer wrote book after book to share his discoveries, restorative regimens and patients' recoveries. My book reviews his ideas about psychiatry, research, biochemistry and the clinical practice of orthomolecular medicine.

I distributed nearly 90 copies of my book during the Mental Health Regained meeting on April 26, 2015 at the Royal York Hotel – some in print, others on CD. You can get a free copy at [www.searpubl.ca](http://www.searpubl.ca)

Thanks to Abram Hoffer's research, discoveries, progress and success, orthomolecular medicine exists today but few people ever hear about it. You can tell them. If you know someone with schizophrenia, psychosis, anxiety, depression, or any other mental illness, you can ask how they're doing. If they suffer or get worse, you can suggest the International Schizophrenia Foundation at 16 Florence Ave., Toronto and their web site [orthomed.org](http://orthomed.org) which has free archives of the *Journal of Orthomolecular Medicine* and information about an annual conference, a reading list and a referral network.

Over his 60-year career, Dr. Abram Hoffer restored thousands of beautiful minds, co-founded orthomolecular medicine and wrote 36 books.

Dr. Hoffer's clinical lessons are still important today - lessons about testing and diagnosing carefully to determine the root cause(s) of each patient's symptoms, planning safe and effective treatments and not being satisfied until each patient recovers enough to get along with his family and community, find work and support himself.

Please remember Dr. Abram Hoffer the remarkable biochemist, researcher, psychiatrist & author who investigated disorders of metabolism, discovered root causes of psychosis and depression, co-founded orthomolecular medicine, developed restorative treatments for schizophrenia and other illnesses, and educated the public – *thank you Abram Hoffer.*

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