

The next decade of mental health drugs

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Numb. Credit: Ten Thirty Nine from Flickr.

Academics advocate for changes to how we development better treatments for mental health.

Leading international academics are advocating for new approaches to drug development for mental health diseases. Their comment article, published today (15 March) in the journal *Nature*, highlights the critical lack of new treatments for mental health disorders, to include Alzheimer's, depression, and schizophrenia.

Professor Barbara Sahakian, of the Department of Psychiatry and MRC/Wellcome Trust Behavioral and Clinical Neuroscience Institute at the University of Cambridge, and Dr. Thomas Insel, Director of the National Institute of Mental Health in the United States, were leaders on the comment piece after a Royal Society meeting held to address the 'pharmacological impasse' concluded that the lack of viable new

treatments ‘calls for a fundamental change in nearly every aspect of translational research in mental health’.

Despite nearly 40% of the population being affected by [mental health](#) issues, which includes everything from depression and dementia to anxiety and schizophrenia, the researchers say there is a crisis in the development of new treatments for these disorders.

Professor Sahakian explains part of the problem, “The pharmaceutical industry has in part withdrawn, either because they struggled to translate research into a viable drug or because of financial pressures. Although some have remained, there are still insufficient resources being focused on diseases which affect a disproportionate percentage of the population.”

In the comment article, they cite genetics as providing fertile ground for drug exploration, highlighting the impact it has had on other medical treatments. Additionally, they propose having academics investigate compounds industry has abandoned.

Professor Sahakian added, “We need to reassess how we identify and validate new drugs, and should consider open access drug development which involves both industry and academia.”

Previous research has shown that mental disorders disproportionately affect the young, with 75% of illnesses having onset before the age of 24. As a result, the academics also advocate for earlier intervention and preventative therapies.

But not all of the new treatments they advocate are pharmacological. They highlight the effectiveness of treatments which integrate medications and psychosocial approaches. Novel approaches could include the use of emerging technology such as the use of video games to

help children with autism interact socially by increasing eye contact.

Provided by University of Cambridge

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