

Response to Fuller Torrey

The director of the Nordic Cochrane Centre, professor Peter C Gøtzsche, sent a letter to the Stanley Medical Research Institute (SMRI) on 16 February because SMRI was one of the funders of the TIPS study where young people with schizophrenia had been followed up for 10 years.

Gøtzsche explained in the letter that he believed “that the research community and the patients have a right to know how many people died in this study and why. Published accounts are not consistent: 49 deaths, 28 deaths and 31 deaths have been reported (see the two attached papers).” He also noted that he had asked the primary author of the TIPS study about the deaths to no avail and that he believed that “funders have an ethical obligation to ensure that information, which is of great importance for public health, and which has been collected in the funded study, gets published. That would be a great service to psychiatry, the patients, and everyone else with an interest in this vitally important issue. When young people who are receiving antipsychotics die, we need to know why they died in order to reduce the risk of death in future.”

Gøtzsche also noted that he and a colleague, Robert Whitaker from Boston, had submitted a letter to the editor of the journal (*World Psychiatry*) where the primary author reported on the deaths in June 2017, asking for details about these deaths and that the editor declined to publish the letter and to ask the primary author for details.

Finally, Gøtzsche noted: “You may consider this a Freedom of Information request, which means that if your organisation does not have detailed information on the deaths in the TIPS study, we expect your organisation to obtain this information from Hegelstad and to send it to us. Anything short of this would be unethical in our view, and we are convinced that patients with psychotic disorders agree with us (I am Protector for the Hearing Voices Network in Denmark).”

You replied to Gøtzsche on 1 March on behalf of the SMRI that the letter in *World Psychiatry* appeared to provide the information about causes of death.

This was clearly not the case, and - in contrast to you - another funder, the Norwegian Research Council, took Gøtzsche’s letter very seriously and demanded of the first author, Ingrid Melle, that she gave us the missing data. As she didn't give us the data we had requested, Gøtzsche complained to the Norwegian Research Council a second time.

The same day you wrote to Gøtzsche, you wrote to Mark G. Wilson, CEO, the Cochrane Collaboration, under the subject heading “Cochrane credibility”:

“The Cochrane Collaboration has made important contributions to improving medical research and treatment trials. Its credibility rests upon the assumption of objectivity among those who are evaluating the research. Such objectivity appears to be very much in doubt for Dr. Peter C. Gøtzsche who identifies himself as the Director of the Nordic Cochrane Center (attached). He also identifies himself as the “Protector of the Hearing Voices Network in Denmark”. This organization promotes the belief that (1) auditory hallucinations are merely one end of a normal behavioral

spectrum, thus casting doubt on whether schizophrenia actually exists as a disease, (2) hearing voices are caused by trauma in childhood, for which there is no solid evidence. Given such clear lack of objectivity, I personally would not find any Cochrane publication on mental illness to be credible. I thought it important to make you aware of the problem."

You accuse professor Gøtzsche for lacking objectivity but provide no evidence for your allegation. Professor Gøtzsche is an experienced researcher and is free to interpret the evidence as he sees fit. However, there is no evidence to be interpreted in the letter Gøtzsche wrote to SMRI. Gøtzsche merely asks for the number of deaths and details about the causes of death, which many other Cochrane researchers do, e.g. in relation to their production of Cochrane reviews.

You draw a conclusion that is a non-sequitur in your letter, namely that you do not find "any Cochrane publication on mental illness to be credible" because Gøtzsche wrote that he is Protector for the Hearing Voices Network in Denmark. You go on to insult the members of this network, although you – being a psychiatrist – should care about these people rather than insult them, and you furthermore provide a false statement saying that there is no solid evidence that hearing voices are caused by trauma in childhood.

The Hearing Voices Network in Denmark has this comment to your views:

The Danish Hearing Voices Network would like to issue a statement with regard to E. Fuller Torrey's complaints against Professor Peter Gøtzsche. Furthermore we take issue with Torrey's attempts to discredit the Hearing Voices Movement so as to add leverage in his attempt to discredit Professor Peter Gøtzsche.

The Hearing Voices Movement exists in 33 countries and the Danish Hearing Voices Network has existed since 2005. This year, Intervoice (the international HVN) will be holding its 10th World Hearing Voices congress attended by people from all over the world. In 2016 the Danish HVN invited professor Peter Gøtzsche to be protector because of his pioneering work regarding psychiatric research. We are honored to have him as our protector.

The Danish HVN regards hearing voices and other unusual experiences as arising from adverse life events, typically trauma, such as sexual abuse, violence, poverty, neglect etc. The link between trauma and psychosis is supported by solid evidence and is dose related. Furthermore we view 'schizophrenia' as being a construction rather than an illness and the diagnosing of the 'illness' as an opinion. There are no biological markers corroborating its existence; something we regard as highly problematic.

Finally, we believe that E. Fuller Torrey's comments to Mr. Wilson regarding Peter Gøtzsche being our protector to be bordering on the ridiculous when he attempts to discredit the whole of the Cochrane Institute by stating 'Given such clear lack of objectivity, I personally would not find any Cochrane publication on mental illness to be credible.'

The Danish HVN would ask that E. Fuller Torrey stops using the HVN as a platform to insult a respected professor along with the Cochrane Institute. We would also suggest that E. Fuller Torrey considers apologizing to the Danish HVN for his disrespectful remarks about voice hearers."

We wish to point out that it has been documented that the diagnosis of schizophrenia has often been found to be wrong when the patients were examined a second time, by other psychiatrists,

and the National Institute of Mental Health finds the diagnosis so problematic that it has recently recommended that it should no longer be used in research funded by the NIMH. Many psychiatrists are currently calling for this diagnosis to be disbanded, which does not mean that there are not patients who suffer from psychosis, only that the criteria for the diagnosis of schizophrenia are so vague and ambiguous that this diagnosis should no longer be used.

In your follow-up letter from 2 March you write that the Hearing Voices Network, according to its own published studies, “encourages individuals who are taking antipsychotics for their schizophrenia to stop taking their medication. It is very difficult to imagine how anyone with these views could possibly be objective regarding a Cochrane study of antipsychotics, thus impugning your credibility which is your most important asset.”

This is another non-sequitur. Furthermore, it has been abundantly documented that many people improve when they come off their antipsychotic drug and that the risk of permanent and serious brain damage is dose related, which is another reason why people should not be treated for many years with antipsychotics. These facts are well-known and have been documented by the psychiatrists themselves.

Finally, we wish to note that there is no confusion in Gøtzsche’s letter to SMRI about whether the letter represents his personal views or those of the Cochrane Collaboration in general. The only “views” in his letter are his statements about the importance of knowing how many people died and why in a cohort of patients with schizophrenia. This can hardly be called a personal view. We believe everyone with an interest in the patients would like to know this.

Response to Anton Pottegård

You wrote a tweet on 8 March about a seminar on psychiatric drug withdrawal professor Peter C Gøtzsche had arranged for psychiatrists after several of them had encouraged him to do so. In your tweet you wrote that Gøtzsche has been asked to distinguish his personal views from those of the Cochrane Collaboration regarding psychotropics.

There are no personal views in Gøtzsche’s advertisement for the seminar.

You also wrote that Gøtzsche used his “Cochrane affiliation” when he invited people for the symposium and a Cochrane email for signup.

We cannot see any problems with this. The announcement for the seminar notes that the two lecturers work at the Nordic Cochrane Centre, which is correct, and that they work on a Cochrane review on withdrawal of psychiatric drugs, which is also correct. People were asked to register for the seminar on general@cochrane.dk, and we see no problems with this either. This email address is the one that is commonly used for all activities undertaken by the Nordic Cochrane Centre.