A leading expert on mental illness outlines the tragic consequences of deinstitutionalization and sounds the call for reform. Beginning in the 1960s in the United States, scores of patients with severe psychiatric disorders were discharged from public mental hospitals. At the same time, activists forced changes in commitment laws that made it impossible to treat half of the patients that left the hospital. The combined effect was profoundly destructive. Today, among homeless persons, at least one-third are severely mentally ill; among the incarcerated, at least one-tenth. Of those individuals living in our communities, many are the victims of violent crime. Other untreated individuals commit crimes, including murder and assault. In The Insanity Offense, E. Fuller Torrey takes full stock of this phenomenon, exploring the causes and consequences as he weaves together narratives of individual tragedies in three states with sobering national data on our failure to treat the mentally ill. In the book's final chapters, Torrey outlines what needs to be done to reverse this ongoing—and accelerating—disaster.

My Personal Review:
Dr. Fuller Torrey provides us with another sane plea to help "the insane"—those whom society has abandoned to homelessness and jail rather than to the medical treatment they so deserve. The US is not alone in its treatment of the victims of serious mental illness. What is seen in the US is repeated in most western countries with only a few exceptions.

A policy of deinstitutionalization has emptied our psychiatric hospitals while the actions of civil libertarian lawyers has allowed them to remain in the community even though they are too ill to make a rational decision.
They are given the authority to refuse treatment when they do not have the capacity to understand that they are ill. These are the two main reasons for the situation we see today. Torrey points out that in 1955, the US population was 164 million and there were about 560,000 patients in psychiatric facilities. By 2006, the US population grew to 300 million. If the proportion of the population in mental institutions was the same as in 1955, there would be over one million hospitalized. Instead, the number is only 40,000.

The emptying of hospitals was initially done for humanitarian reasons and coincided with the development of better medication. Unfortunately, the medication was not as effective as initially hoped and those discharged were not provided with support or services in the community. Getting someone psychiatric care and into hospital was described by D. J Jaffe as more difficult than getting into Harvard Law School. That was in 1991 and Jaffe was a spokesperson for the New York City Friends and Advocates for the Mentally Ill. That same situation exists today.

Lawyers and civil libertarians quote John Stuart Mill's On Liberty for their reasons for allowing the mentally non competent to make treatment decisions. Mill said that "the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not sufficient warrant."

At the time Mill wrote that, there were few effective medical treatments for anything let alone schizophrenia.

However, in the very next paragraph, Mill offers an exception for the above quoted assertion used by so many of the so called friends of the mentally ill. He says that "those who are still in a state to require being taken care of by others must be protected against their own actions as well as against personal injury."

Let us hope that Dr. Torrey's book and his activity to change the laws through the Treatment Advocacy Center will win out in the end.

Marvin Ross Author of Schizophrenia: Medicine's Mystery - Society's Shame

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The Insanity Offense: How Americas Failure to Treat the Seriously Mentally Ill Endangers Its Citizens by E. Fuller Torrey - 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price!