ELSC Seminar: Hagai Bergman

May 1, 2014

On the topic of: The one who does not learn from history is bound to live through it again? the lesson of frontal lobotomy

ELSC cordially invite you
to the lecture given by:

Hagai Bergman
The Hebrew University ? Hadassah Medical School and the Edmond and Lily Safra Center (ELSC) for Brain Research

On the topic of:

The one who does not learn from history is bound to live through it again? the lesson of frontal lobotomy

The lecture will be held on Thursday, May 1, 2014
at 17:00, at ELSC: Silverman Bldg., 3rd Wing, 6th Floor, Edmond J. Safra Campus

Light refreshments at 16:45

Abstract:

During the 2014 ELSC Ein-Gedi retreat there was a hot debate between two ELSC professors (me being one of them) re the logic and ethics behind the development and use of electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) and frontal lobotomy for the treatment of severe mental disorders. My understanding of the other side of the debate is that in his view these therapies are good examples of senseless, dangerous and inhumane procedures that should, and would have been, better to have been avoided.
ECT and frontal lobotomy cannot be lumped together. There is wide consensus today that the benefit-risk balance of ECT treatment of severe (and other treatment resistant) depression and additional mental disorders is very positive. ECT, with muscle relaxants and under general anesthesia, is therefore frequently used today in all medical centers as a last line of intervention that significantly improves the quality of life of patients. On the other hand, frontal lobotomy has become a highly criticized procedure by most clinicians, and an exemplary instance of a procedure with a very negative benefit-risk ratio.

In this seminar, I will try to outline the history of the frontal lobotomy. I will try to show that the leaders and the practitioners of this procedure were motivated by their desire to help their patients. I will try to convince you that we should not judge the past by its successes or failures, neither by today's ethical standards nor knowledge. Finally, I will try to learn from the history of the frontal lobotomy and discuss the ethical ways for the ongoing search for better treatments for one of the most discriminated sector of humans – those of us with severe mental disorders.

Disclaimer:

The speaker does not have any formal training in the fields of the history of science/medicine and medical/general ethics.

The explicit goal of the speaker is to convince the audience to change their research goals from the theoretical study of a single channel, neuron or activated region in the brain (and alike) to research that is aimed at making a change in the life of so many human patients who are still tortured by their brain and mind.

Further reading:

- Jack El-Hai; The Lobotomist: A Maverick Medical Genius and His Tragic Quest to Rid the World of Mental Illness.
- Howard Dully & Charles Fleming; My Lobotomy
- Elliot S. Valenstein; Great and Desperate Cures: The Rise and Decline of Psychosurgery and Other Radical Treatments for Mental Illness
- Jack D. Pressman; Last Resort: Psychosurgery and the Limits of Medicine (Cambridge Studies in the History of Medicine)

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