

### A PILL FOR ALL OCCASIONS!

The BBC recently ran a program on summer camps in the United States, focusing on a new phenomenon — long lines of American youngsters queuing up before breakfast for their daily dose of pills; for anxiety, attention deficit disorders, depression, panic attacks and numerous other behavioural problems. Apparently, such pill parades are not uncommon.

The reasons are complex, but appear to reflect current cultural expectations that families be happy and perfect, coupled with a low societal tolerance for ill health. Compounding these factors is direct health advertising that markets a pill for every conceivable health problem. Any deviation from normality requires not only a medical interpretation but also intervention. It seems that philosopher Ivan Illich's prophesy that "the medicalization of health increases demand for services far beyond the possible and useful, and undermines that organic coping ability which common sense calls health" is alive and well.

On 1 April this year, the *BMJ* reported that Australian scientists had uncovered a new health condition — motivational deficiency disorder (MoDeD), characterised by overwhelming and debilitating apathy. The report estimated that MoDeD might cost the Australian economy \$2.4 billion a year in lost productivity, but that, thankfully, an effective and well tolerated pill had been developed. The ground-breaking work must have enjoyed widespread interest, and for good reasons! Here was a potential medical explanation for poor school performance, lack of ambition, voluntary unemployment and alternative lifestyles.

Two weeks later the *BMJ* revealed that MoDeD was an April Fool's Day prank. Understandably, the media was not amused. New Zealand's *Dominion Post* thundered, "Credibility is hard earned. You have damaged yours and ours ..."

Clearly, modern society expects medicine to provide a pill for all occasions, whether these be aberrations of eating, drinking, learning, working, loving, sleeping, or anything else. Illich would turn in his grave.



Martin B Van Der Weyden

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**Cover image:** Didi Cusack underwent liver transplant surgery for biliary atresia at The Children's Hospital at Westmead in September 2005, aged 13 months. The transplant team was led by Dr Albert Shun.  Didi, her older brother Wilbur, and parents Kaylene and Perry, returned to their hometown of Perth in early August after spending 18 months in Sydney for the operation and follow-up treatment. Didi, whose chances of survival were slim prior to the transplant, is now thriving.

Photo taken from the photographic exhibition, *Face of Donation*, by Marco Sacchi.

## July MJA BookClub \$150 Gift Voucher Winner

Congratulations to Dr Younes Ismail of Condobolin, NSW. Dr Ismail has won the July *MJA BookClub \$150 Gift Voucher* to spend on any books from the MJA BookClub. Julie Chappell, the MJA BookClub Manager (pictured), said "The promotion was a huge success and we thank all the doctors, students and general health care professionals who purchased books from the July



 MJA BookClub and went into the draw to win the voucher. Unfortunately, there can only be one winner, but because of the success of the promotion, we are running it again this month. To enter all you have to do is purchase the September *Book of the Month* or any September *Feature Book*, and you go into the draw to win the voucher — what could be more simple?"

For this month's MJA BookClub, see page 278 for our "Book of the Month" and the Inside Back Cover for our "Feature Books".

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