

1.

What is it like to be given pills that make you forget your own name? Or make your fingers so stiff that you can't type, can't dial a phone, can't open a bag of chips? Or make you slur your words, so you can't communicate intelligibly, especially by phone? Or make your ears ring, or your vision blur, impairing your ability to perceive your surroundings?

What is it like to have no choice about whether to continue to take such pills? Anyone reading this may experience psychosis someday, even if you never have before, in rare reactions to antibiotics, antidepressants, cough syrup, recovery from surgery and even to Covid.

This policy isn't just about the rights of scary, smelly homeless people to push their shopping carts into traffic. The civil rights to bodily autonomy may someday well be your own rights.

2.

You may have heard stories from family members of psychotic people, who ask you to provide the legal tool of AOT so that they can force their loved ones into taking pills. I have heard the other side.

I used to participate in online Zoom meetings about psychopharmacology research. Twice, such meetings were hijacked by family members who went off-topic to plead for legal help to free their loved ones from AOT orders that were already in place. These family members saw their loved ones experiencing horrendous side effects of antipsychotics that were incapacitating, leading to both mental and physical deterioration, and putting their loved ones on a path to an early death. They were literally crying, begging for help in their struggle against the judges and psychiatrists who imposed the AOT orders.

These family members clearly did not feel that the involvement of the legal system in their loved ones' treatment was beneficial. Their anguish was real, and I can only imagine the far greater suffering of their loved ones, the AOT recipients themselves, incapacitated, deteriorating, and dying due to side effects.

3.

You may have also heard stories about psychotic people committing violent crimes. In a statistical approach, if you look at another group of people – males between age 15 and 24 – you find that these young males commit violent crimes at a much higher rate than psychotic people do. If your goal is to keep society safe from violence, will you preemptively lock up every young male? Of course not, because in our legal system, people have the civil right to be punished for crimes that they committed in the past, not crimes that they may commit in the future, no matter what statistical group they belong to. Just as young males have this civil right, so do people who experience psychosis.

4.

In conclusion, there is an old proverb in German and in Arabic:

Don't ask the doctor, ask the patient!