

My Medication Problem

—Franklin Means



It is no secret that I have Bi-Polar Disorder and PTSD. It's not easy to live with these two conditions. Without medication I have severe mood swings, go days without sleep, suffer from paranoia and battle depression. The last batch of drugs caused me to break out with a skin rash and turned me into a zombie. That feeling is no fun. It makes your day drag on and you have no motivation, impairing your reaction time while putting you in a lethargic state. My medications cause bad bouts of depression and insomnia, making it hard to get up in the mornings. I have missed many of my classes this semester. It is very hard to wake up when there is no motivation or desire to get out of bed. And this is not a feeling that can be pushed aside or thought away.

I only recently found out that I have Bi-Polar Disorder and my PTSD is not combat related. I used to be an emergency 911 dispatcher. The job was great for about the first month. Then, I received a call from a woman who was murdered

while I was on the phone with her. I can trace back all of my problems to this single instance in my life. I thought it was normal to be paranoid, stressed out, and not sleep for a few days at a time. I joined the US Army to get away from these problems, to make a drastic change in my life and how I felt. However, and in retrospect, joining the military only delayed the inevitable.

Things were going good until I received a subpoena to appear in the murder trial. The feelings started all over again: problems sleeping, depression and anxiety resurfaced. This, of course, disrupted my military career and I was deemed unfit for service after a year of treatment and no results. It was hard to concentrate on the military because I heard that woman beg me for help every day. Complicating matters, I even got entangled in a wrongful death suit for the whole thing. The man who killed her had held her hostage all morning. When she got away he chased her with his truck and ran her car off of the road. I had her on the phone during the chase. After her car stopped rolling over he ran to it and shot her five times, killing her. I am still unable to figure out why they are suing *me*. I received a medical discharge in October 2008 with no deployments. I felt pretty worthless since the doctors didn't trust me to be a medic and do my job. So I went home.

I had a job lined up, but I was still having problems with sleep. Then, about two months later, the VA called me in for an appointment with a psychiatrist. They determined that the reason I was having so many problems with the PTSD was because of Bi-Polar Disorder. Things started to make sense: My constant battle with depression and insomnia wasn't normal. I now know why. Bi-polar disorder causes severe mood swings. The highs and lows which make depression and anxiety worse are not easy to deal with. During the high phase, you need little or no sleep and this can last for days. The low phase is an extreme depression that seems to never end. In my case, it seemed that there was no middle-ground without treatment.

I'm still in a constant battle to get the right combination of medications. I have tried a list of meds a mile long and counting. Sometimes, it's a little overwhelming. I can't get "leveled off" or be a "normal" person. I would at least like to *feel* normal. Every time I change meds I have severe mood swings that are jeopardizing my marriage and college career. Sometimes, I don't know which way to turn and don't care if I fail or not. If you have ever had the "hell with it feeling," you know how I feel most of the time. I know the VA is doing their best to help me, and if not for the VA I would be in serious trouble. I am both hopeful and frustrated, but I know, eventually, I will get this under control.