

The Nature of Medical Research

Howard Lotsof's life story

By Patricia A. Muehsam, M.D. *Last Updated:* November 28, 2010 *Created:* March 2, 2010

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I must confess that I read that other newspaper, the other Times [The New York Times] based in the city in which I reside. In fact, I'm a six-day-a-week subscriber. I mostly enjoy the crossword puzzles and the Arts and Leisure section. But this rag of note never fails to get my goat, and I have particular disdain for the Science and Health sections because they all too often reflect a worldview that promotes propaganda over truth in science.

The reason for this treatise all started with my visit to page A25, the Obituary page, on Thursday, Feb. 18. [nytimes.com/2010/02/17](http://nytimes.com/2010/02/17/us/17lotsof.html)

us/17lotsof.html I must also confess I'm a fan of the obituaries. Some might say I am obsessed with death. Rather, I enjoy reading about interesting lives lived found in this section.

It was in the Obituary section that I learned of Howard Lotsof's life. I had never heard of Mr. Lotsof. Mr. Lotsof's life story reveals much about the flawed nature of medical research.

Addicted to heroin at the age of 19, Howard Lotsof found a cure for himself in a natural plant substance now called ibogaine. This life experience led to a career as an amateur pharmacologist and addiction researcher, in spite of the fact that he was an undergraduate major in film at New York University without a doctoral degree. In fact, according to the piece, he was successful "in inducing the National Institute on Drug Abuse in to undertake a research project on ibogaine that produced scores of peer-reviewed publications ..." However, Mr. Lotsof's research, approved by the FDA, failed to materialize due to "contractual disputes and lack of financing."

Herbert D. Kleber, M.D., director of the division on substance abuse at the New York State Psychiatric Institute at Columbia University, is quoted in Mr. Lotsof's obituary. His expertise is supported by his Columbia University position. Regarding ibogaine's potential for addiction treatment, he expresses his skepticism: "... there is a lack of controlled scientific studies to back those beliefs."

Ibogaine, a natural substance, cannot be patented by the pharmaceutical industry. Economics often dictates research inquiry, not potential truths of nature or even science for that matter.

Furthermore, the glass ceiling of medical research, not to be confused with scientific research (medical endeavors are not necessarily scientific endeavors), limits outsiders. Yet, often it has been the forward thinking and unbiased perspectives of outsiders who have thought outside of the box and worked peripherally to the glass ceiling, which have ushered in significant revolutions in medical and scientific thinking.

It takes a Howard Lotsof to get us to think outside of the box. Often we need fewer degrees, an open mind, and even personal experience.

In a future article, I'll share some examples of outside-of-the-box thinkers and the revolutions in medicine and science they ushered in.

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