Prozac

Prozac (or fluoxetine) has become a popular (both in the positive and negative senses) form of somatic therapy for depression. It is one of several drugs in the group of serotonin selective uptake inhibitors (SSUIs), meaning that the drug and its metabolites act exclusively to inhibit serotonin uptake - little or no effect occurs on other neurotransmitters. For patients the main advantage of fluoxetine is that, as a direct result of other neurotransmitters remaining unaltered, the number and degree of side effects is significantly less - some experience nausea, anxiety, or insomnia, but there is no weight gain or risk of cardiac damage. There are no significant drug interaction problems, and the risk of dangerous overdose is greatly lessened. The starting dose is also the dose at 20 mg/d - no titration is involved. Improvement can be seen as early as 1 week after start, with main effects occurring within 2-4 weeks. A trial of 6-8 weeks is recommended before declaring it ineffective.

The controversy surrounding Prozac has been inspired by the cult group known as the Church of Scientology, an organization that opposes all forms of psychiatric treatment (primarily because it interferes with their own methods of "healing" - read "manipulation"). A former aide to the founder of this movement stated that their goal is "to remove psychiatry completely from the world and to put
Scientology in its place as the foremost mental health therapy." To further this cause, Scientologists cite a Newsweek article, detailing some cases where people reported negative Sx with Prozac, primarily thoughts of self-mutilation, suicide, and general violence. Primary support for this article came from a study by Teicher et al., 1990, in which 6 patients exhibited intense suicidal thoughts after taking Prozac. However, although Teicher could find no other explanation than Prozac for the sudden onset of these thoughts, he could not rule out depression itself as the source of these Sx. Indeed, the Newsweek article supports that claim, saying that "depression itself can cause suicide and violence, even in people receiving treatment," and a quote from a Lilly researcher matter-of-factly states that "Prozac tends to be used by people with psychiatric problems. Some people with psychiatric problems happen to be violent." The article further supports by reminding its audience that "any antidepressant could prompt a depressed person to act on impulses he already harbored, simply by making him restless. ...Most people don't become violent or suicidal just because they feel restless. But the sensation can be too much for a mentally ill person to bear." Studies done following this outcry, such as that of Fava and Rosenbaum (1990), showed no significant difference between various antidepressants on suicidal ideation. [NOTE: the Newsweek article ends with the statement that Teicher himself does not plan to halt
prescriptions of Prozac, and when Scientologists later cited his paper as the crux of their argument, he dismissed their interpretation of his findings as "absolutely irresponsible."