

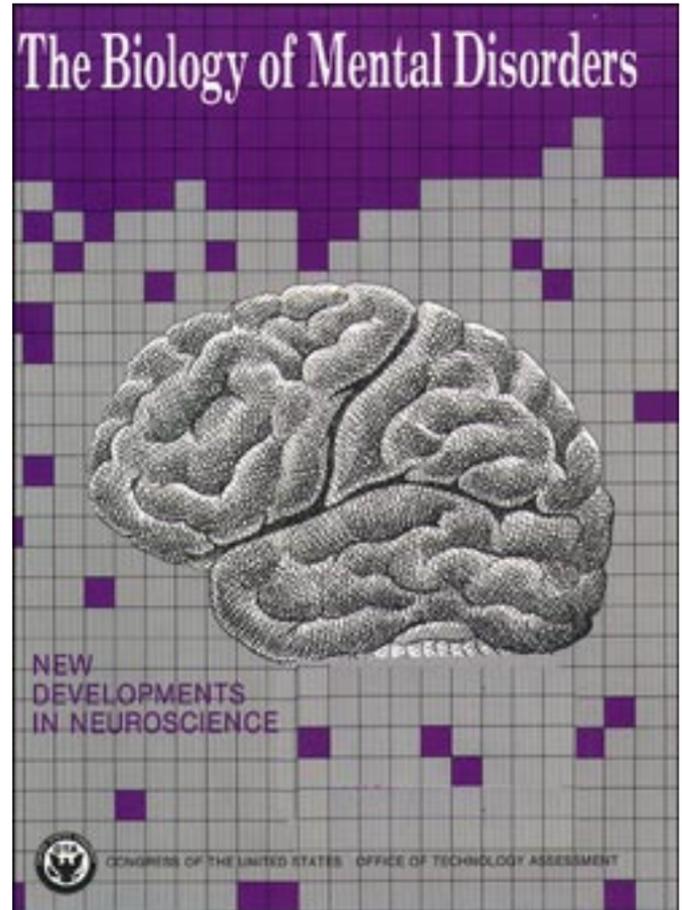
The Biology of Mental Disorders

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In Appreciation

SILVIO O. CONTE



The Office of Technology Assessment dedicates this report to the memory of the late Congressman Silvio *O.* Conte, in recognition of his enthusiastic support for research into the brain and mental disorders. Congressman Conte demonstrated that support in many ways, including his request for this study. His leadership in this area significantly contributed to the gains, already made and yet to come, in understanding and treating mental disorders.

Foreword

The 1990s bear witness to two opposing realities of mental illness. One is the pressing and even tragic nature of mental disorders: serious mental disorders, including schizophrenia and major mood and anxiety disorders, afflict millions of Americans, producing long-lasting and disabling symptoms. The other reality is improved technologies and advances in brain research that provide hope for alleviating the substantial burden of mental disorders—to individuals with these conditions, their families, and society at large—and the continuing research and development that promises future gains.

Recognizing both the public health problem posed by mental disorders and the recent gains and future promise of brain research, several congressional committees requested or endorsed this report, which is the fourth in a series of OTA studies on ‘‘New Developments in Neuroscience.’’ The House Committees on Appropriations; Energy and Commerce; Science, Space, and Technology; Veteran Affairs; and the Senate Subcommittee on Science, Technology, and Space of the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation requested this study. The study was endorsed by Senator Edward M. Kennedy, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources.

The Biology of Mental Disorders presents a summary of research into the biological factors associated with schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, major depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and panic disorder. The report also discusses support for this research and the social context in which it moves forward. OTA concludes that, indeed, there have been important advances in understanding the biology of these disorders, and that rich opportunities for further research exist. While we know that these mental disorders cannot be understood in biological terms alone—psychological and social factors are important for a complete picture of mental disorders and their treatment—we conclude that further biological research will significantly improve our understanding and treatment of these conditions. Mindful of the advances and continued opportunities in research, the report provides policy options for action by the U.S. Congress in three areas: support for research, implications of research findings, and the dissemination of new information.

OTA prepared this report with the assistance of a panel of advisers and reviewers selected for their expertise and diverse points of view. Additionally, dozens of individuals from academia, professional and advocacy groups, and Federal agencies cooperated with OTA staff through interviews or by providing written material. OTA gratefully acknowledges the contribution of each of these individuals. As with all OTA reports, however, the responsibility for the contents of this report is OTA’s alone.



JOHN H. GIBBONS
Director

¹ U.S. Congress, Office of Technology Assessment, *Neurotoxicity: Identifying and Controlling Poisons of the Nervous System*, OTA-BA-436 (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, April 1990); U.S. Congress, Office of Technology Assessment, *Neural Grafting: Repairing the Brain and Spinal Cord*, OTA-BA-462 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, September 1990); U.S. Congress, Office of Technology Assessment, *Biological Rhythms: Implications for the Worker*, OTA-BA-463 (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, September 1991).

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NOTE: OTA appreciates and is grateful for the valuable assistance and thoughtful critiques provided by the advisory **panel** members. The panel does not, however, necessarily approve, disapprove, or endorse this report. OTA assumes **full** responsibility for the report and the accuracy of its contents.

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