

## CALL FOR PAPERS

ESF Research Networking Programme DRUGS

**Workshop 23-25 April 2009**

Descartes Center for the History and Philosophy of the Sciences and the Humanities  
University of Utrecht, The Netherlands.

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**STANDARDIZING PSYCHOACTIVE DRUGS AND DRUG USES 1900-1970**

**Dead line: 1 December 2008**

Psychoactive drugs and drug treatments, within psychiatry, as well as those that have entered the public domain, have begun increasingly to attract the interest of historical researchers. An aspect of this research is the search for generalized concepts that can be used to understand the dynamics of the life-cycles of drugs. One such concept, and the focus of a new research program, sponsored by the European Science Foundation, is that of 'standardization'. Standardization, understood as the assembly of techniques that result in selection and homogenization, seems to have been an important feature of the development, production, distribution, regulation and use of psychoactive drugs since at least the early 1900s. It also seems to be a characteristic feature of developments in local experimental and clinical practices, national styles of regulation, shaping of consumer demand, and national and local cultures of consumption.

This workshop will focus on present research into the histories of psychoactive drugs from this perspective of standardization, especially studies that connect practices at local, regional and (inter-)national levels. Starting with barbiturates in the early 1900s, and followed by amphetamines in the 1930s, standardized compounds were increasingly used in the treatment of mental problems within medicine, but also in the public sphere for purposes of self-medication, recreation or self-enhancement.

In the 1950s, new drugs, such as chlorpromazine and other antipsychotic drugs, as well as the benzodiazepines and the hallucinogens, created what has often been regarded as a therapeutic revolution in psychiatry, not to mention a 'drug revolution' in society. The concept of a therapeutic revolution, however, is a contested notion. Historical evidence, for example, points to ongoing problems in establishing the psychopharmacological effects of drugs in clinical practice. Additionally, there is evidence of continuity with earlier developments in psychiatry. Also, researchers continue to face many important, unanswered questions. How were these psychotropic drugs and their various uses subjected to a process of standardization? To what extent did attempts to standardize drugs and treatments also prompt

the standardization of patient and other user groups (in terms of gender, age, or even ethnicity)? And what role can we ascribe to state administration and financing, as well as company marketing in the standardization process? Or, to what extent did drugs as ‘precarious matters’ possess aspects of instability, ambivalence, and risk that resisted attempts at standardization?

The workshop’s key themes are the extent of standardization, its meaning for understanding the dynamics of the life-cycles of drugs and treatment and other practices of use, as well as the failures of and obstacles to the process of standardization.

The workshop is a collaborative project of the Working Group on Psychotropic Drugs of the European Science Foundation. The Working Group includes researchers from the universities of Zurich, Berlin (the Charité), Brussels and Amsterdam (VU-University Medical Center).

The workshop will be held on 23-25 April 2009 at the Descartes Center for the History and Philosophy of the Sciences and the Humanities, University of Utrecht, The Netherlands. Proposals for papers should be sent to Dr Stephen Snelders ([s.snelders@vumc.nl](mailto:s.snelders@vumc.nl)) or Prof Dr Toine Pieters ([a.pieters@vumc.nl](mailto:a.pieters@vumc.nl)) by 1 December 2008. Abstracts should not exceed 350 words.