A pain doctor asserts that opiates can cure a range of conditions in the bipolar spectrum.

In his third book on pain, Cochran sets forth his experience in treating bipolar patients—who also complain of various pains—with opiates (oxycodone, morphine, etc.), stimulants (amphetamine derivatives) and mood-altering drugs (from Prozac to Valium). Many establishment doctors will dismiss Cochran as a reckless diagnostician and careless prescriber of dangerous drugs, but his patients (at least those in his book) laud him as a generous, sympathetic healer of ills that other physicians either failed to recognize or gave up trying to relieve. Cochran includes numerous case histories of patients whose experiences support his contention that opiates can cure anything that falls within his definition of the bipolar spectrum. “I have, with opiate therapy, relieved mood-shifting bipolarity, narcolepsy, attention deficiency, obsessive-compulsive disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, and multiple personality disorder. I have also relieved…pain, tremors such as akathisia and Tourette’s, compulsive hair-pulling, obsessive worry, nocturia, even salt and opiate cravings.” He writes with disarming honesty, admitting that “I know I have taken great liberties with the diagnostic tables, as I so often do” and that his use of opiates for these conditions “is about as non-FDA approved, off-label prescribing as one can get.” But he justifies these controversial practices by the uniformly positive outcomes of his patients. Well, almost uniformly positive: he loses track of at least one of his bipolar disorder patients after he wrote her prescriptions for oxycodone and methadone. Cochran concludes with a chapter about the stigma associated with opiate use. This stigma, he says, stands in the way of patients like his getting the cure they need. Throughout, Cochran writes with clarity, avoids medical jargon and proffers ample, if not altogether convincing, justification for his unconventional views while providing real insight into the lives of his patients.

Panacea or poppycock; either way, Cochran offers a thought-provoking account of a doctor who’s not afraid to bend the rules to benefit his patients.