On a chilly morning in November 2001, David Healy stood in a witness box in Kansas City, Kansas, and received a sobering lesson on the US legal system. A professor of psychological medicine at Cardiff University in Wales, Healy was an expert on serotonin, depression and the brain. He had served as secretary of the British Association for Psychopharmacology. Drug companies sought his advice. He was widely published in scientific journals.

Healy had crossed the Atlantic to testify in a lawsuit filed against the pharmaceutical firm Pfizer by the parents of a teenager who had hanged himself in his bedroom closet. Thirteen-year-old Matthew Miller had just started taking Zoloft, a drug that can ease depression by boosting serotonin levels in the brain. But the medication seemed to backfire. During his week on Zoloft, Matthew grew "more agitated than I had ever seen him," his mother, Cheryl Miller, later recalled. She and her husband, Mark, believed their son’s suicide was a direct and gruesome side effect of the drug.

The Millers knew that psychiatrists had seen violent suicidal behavior in a handful of patients taking selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) like Zoloft. They invited Healy to testify about this rare phenomenon. Though he routinely prescribed SSRIs in his own practice, Healy had become increasingly outspoken about the dangers of these antidepressants. He believed the evidence showed that the drug could be largely blamed for Matthew’s suicide.
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**About Barry Yeoman**

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