

ECT - memory loss

Unilateral ECT Minimizes Short-Term Memory Loss

Investigators in one study found that half of the patients treated with bilateral ECT complained of persistent memory deficits, but few of those treated with right or left unilateral ECT had such complaints 2-5 years after treatment.

The groups did not vary on the Wechsler Memory Scale, Dr. Taylor and his associates say.

In another study, a comparison of the recent and remote memories of inpatients who received at least five unilateral or bilateral ECT treatments and equally ill control patients who did not receive ECT showed that 6-9 months after the last treatment, memory in the

patients who received ECT was comparable with that in the control patients, the investigators say (Biol. Psychiatry 17:1169-93, 1982).

Researchers in a 1973 study found that 7 years after receiving at least 50 ECT treatments, 22 chronic schizophrenic patients had no more memory loss than did an equal number of schizophrenics who received no ECT. Unlike the control patients, however, the ECT patients showed deficits in their perceptual motor functioning, the investigators say.

In a 1981 study, 43 patients who received ECT had some memory deficit 1 week after final treatment, but their

ability to recall public events and television programs had returned after 7 months.

However, ECT was found to diminish markedly their ability to recall autobiographic data even after 7 months, they report.

"Given that cognitive dysfunction, primarily in memory, is virtually the only significant side effect of ECT, one that is irrelevant to its therapeutic function . . . unilateral ECT should be used more frequently than it is," the investigators say.

Dr. Taylor's associates in this study were Drs. Rachel Tompkins, Renee Demers, and Dale Anderson.