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ELECTROCONVULSIVE THERAPY

Report of the Task Force on Electroconvulsive Therapy
of the American Psychiatric Association

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Publication authorized by the Board of Trustees
May 1978

AMERICAN PSYCHIATRIC ASSOCIATION
1700 18th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20009

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"Granting that the question is a gross over-simplification, which of the following *best* characterizes your attitude toward the use of ECT"

	Obtained response
1. Totally opposed to its use	2%
2. Generally opposed, but O.K. as a last resort in a few selected instances	22%
3. No really strong feeling, but tend to be more opposed than favorable	8%
4. Ambivalent; undecided	1%
5. No really strong feeling, but tend to be more favorable than opposed	6%
6. Generally favorable for appropriate patients	54%
7. Decidedly favorable to its use	7%

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Thus, we see that 32% expressed some degree of opposition, one percent, ambivalence; and 67% some degree of favorable attitude.

Responses to more specific statements about ECT were distributed as follows (the difference to 100% reflecting response of no opinion/ambivalent/undecided):

	% Agree	% Disagree
1. There are many patients for whom ECT, either alone or in combination with other measures, is the safest, least expensive, and most effective form of treatment	72%	20%
2. Any psychiatric institution claiming to offer comprehensive care should be equipped to provide ECT	83%	12%
3. ECT should be used only when all else has failed	38%	57%
4. The introduction of antidepressants and phenothiazines has made the use of ECT obsolete	7%	87%
5. The use of ECT should be discontinued or at least should be curtailed	16%	75%

6. It is likely that ECT produces slight or subtle brain damage	41%	26%
7. There is a need for more explicit guidelines (perhaps from APA) for the proper use of ECT	69%	20%
8. The issuance of guidelines from any source for the use of ECT is likely to interfere with good patient care	22%	65%
9. ECT should not be administered to children 16 or under	57%	16%

Large percentages of the respondents feel that ECT is a valuable treatment technique and a majority would welcome explicit guidelines for its use.

Appropriate diagnosis/problem

Respondents were asked to rate the degree of appropriateness of ECT (assuming no physical contraindications) for 11 diagnoses/problems. Collapsing the six-point scale into "appropriate," "undecided" and "not appropriate," the following results were obtained (the difference to 100% reflecting rounding error and those who indicated opposition to the use of ECT for all patients):

	<u>Appropriate</u>	<u>Undecided</u>	<u>Not Appropriate</u>
Minor (non-psy- chotic) depression	6%	2%	88%
Major depression	86%	6%	7%
Schizophrenia (acute or chronic)	25%	15%	59%
Manic excitement	42%	13%	43%
Drug or alcohol abuse	1%	2%	94%
Personality dis- orders	2%	1%	93%
Sexual dysfunction	1%	1%	93%
Anorexia nervosa	11%	17%	70%
Intractable pain	8%	18%	72%
Unremitting hypo- chondriasis	11%	17%	70%
Toxic dementias	2%	3%	91%

In addition, 274 respondents rated ECT as appropriate for a variety of diagnoses. Space for "Other, please specify" was provided. Of the 274 respondents, 100 went to the effort of specifying a diagnosis for which they considered ECT appropriate. The preceding table provides the appropriateness ratings for most respondents for most accepted practices and the average rating for ECT. On the other hand, it is clear that respondents view ECT as appropriate for a wide variety of diagnoses. Little evidence of efficacy or opinion favors the use of other treatments dealt with in Chapter III.

Percentage of Respondents Using ECT

After excluding 9% of respondents who do not spend at least 50% of a usual work week on activities related to psychiatric practice, respondents were categorized as "users" whether or not they had either used or supervised ECT in the last six months, or whether or not they had personally treated patients with ECT (in this definition, 11% had personally treated patients with ECT in the last six months), and 11% had recommended ECT. In total, these two groups were 22% of the respondents.

Characteristics Distinguishing ECT Users from Non-Users

The following characteristics distinguish the User vs. Non-User categories: age, sex, foreign medical school, current practice, geographical location, type of practice, psychopathology, and attitude toward ECT. There is a higher percentage of males than females among ECT Users. Likewise, psychiatrists are more likely to be ECT Users than those in group private offices, and those in large or medium-sized hospitals than did members of other hospital settings. Of the eight "theoretical orientations" (biomedical; organic, neurophysiological; other than Freudian; behaviorist; eclectic; other), the majority of ECT Users are eclectic or eclectic/biomedical.