

Study Shows Patients Misled About Electroshock Causing Permanent Memory Loss

Mental Health Watchdog CCHR points out patients are misled about electroshock's adverse effects, including permanent memory loss and brain damage.

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- Experts have warned that more than 50% of patients given [electroshock treatment](#), also known as electroconvulsive therapy or ECT, may suffer permanent memory loss and that leaflets about the procedure's risks fail to adequately



Patient leaflets from psychiatric units that provide ECT are “minimizing the risks and exaggerating the benefits.”

inform patients and their families of the serious adverse effects. In a study published in *Psychology and Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice*, Professor John Read of East London University and colleagues examined patient leaflets from psychiatric units that provide ECT across Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales and found they were “minimizing the risks and

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Professor John Read

exaggerating the benefits.”[1] Professor Read noted, “By not giving patients the full facts, those administering ECT are contravening the very basic principles of informed consent. If the risks are not being spelled out, how can patients possibly give consent to a treatment?”[2] Mental health industry watchdog [Citizens Commission on Human Rights International](#) says the same is true of information it found in the U.S. and says it could constitute consumer fraud. With 100,000 Americans estimated to receive ECT each year, including children ages 5 or younger, CCHR says

it is catastrophic that it is still even used.

In their study, Professor Read and colleagues found that memory loss was minimized in the leaflets and often blamed on “depression.”[3] He noted in an interview about the study with The

Sunday Post that, "International research has shown patients suffering permanent loss of their childhood memories. Some don't even remember their wedding day, or their family. But, time and again, these memory risks are minimized or dismissed in leaflets offered to patients here." [4]

Other misleading information Read and colleagues found included: Only three ECT leaflets admitted it was not known how ECT worked. The cardiovascular risks of ECT were mentioned by only five leaflets. And just two included mortality risks but from multiple general anesthetic procedures. Only one revealed there was no evidence of long-term benefits. All leaflets claimed ECT saved lives. Read said: "Our study showed most of the patients being offered ECT are being told it may be the only thing that could help them." [5]

CCHR, which has investigated the damaging effects of ECT on thousands of patients since the group was formed in 1969, conducted a similar analysis of online information about ECT offered to patients in the U.S. Sample ECT pages for 15 psychiatric facilities in Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Wisconsin were reviewed. An additional seven ECT consent forms were analyzed. Only two consent forms informed patients that ECT cannot cure their mental problems. Another form reported only "temporary loss of recent remote memories" following ECT and only two went as far as to mention more permanent memory gaps following ECT but said these potentially returned. Only one stated: "However, there are reports of some people who have memory loss that is much more serious, long lasting or permanent. In addition, some people report difficulties with thinking and problem solving," but added: "There is not enough research to predict which person will experience a return to improved thinking and memory, have temporary problems, or have more severe difficulties and/or memory loss for which there is no known treatment."

In one consent form, it says "no guarantees were made concerning the outcome, as the practice of medicine and psychiatry is not an exact science."

None of the online literature or consent forms Professor Read or CCHR analyzed mention the potential of brain damage in relation to ECT. Yet, as Professor Read told The Observer, "We know it causes brain damage. However, we don't know how much damage is caused, or in how many patients, and until that is the case, there is no ethical or scientific justification for its use." [6]

The Los Angeles law firm Wisner Baum devotes a section of its website to warning potential ECT consumers of brain-damaging risks. It refutes the misleading information that ECT prescribers claim, stating: "There are no long-term studies that show ECT is safe or effective. ECT can cause brain damage, permanent memory loss and neurocognitive injury." It also states, "Dozens of lawsuits have been filed across the United States by survivors harmed by...ECT devices." A 2019 review of more than 80 studies is cited that found about one in 50 people suffer "major adverse cardiac events" after ECT. [7]

Wisner Baum quotes expert Kenneth Castleman, a biomedical electrical engineer and former

Senior Scientist at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, stating: "The amount of electric current that an ECT machine puts through a patient's head is about 200 times what is considered dangerous for accidental electric shock, approximately 100 times what Tasers, cattle prods, and electric fences use, about the same as what is used for stunning pigs before slaughter, and roughly one-fifth as much as the electric chair. In addition, the amount of voltage applied to the head (460 volts) is about 400 times what is required to damage a single brain cell. Clearly this amount of electricity has the potential to cause injury to the brain." [8]

CCHR says the misinformation being given to patients about ECT begs for an investigation into consumer fraud. The U.S. National Health Care Anti-Fraud Association says the most common kind of health care fraud involves "a false statement, misrepresentation or deliberate omission that is critical to the determination of [health insurance] benefits payable." [9]

Ultimately, CCHR says all ECT should be banned and urges people to support its online [petition](#) calling for this.

[1] John Read, Lisa Morrison, Chris Harrop, "An independent audit of electroconvulsive therapy patient information leaflets in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales," *Psychology and Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice*, 19 July 2023 <https://doi.org/10.1111/papt.12481>, <https://bpspsychub.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/papt.12481>; Marion Scott, "Expert warns half of patients given electric shock treatment at risk of memory loss: Call to suspend controversial therapy," *The Sunday Post*, 27 Aug. 2023

[2] Marion Scott, "Expert warns half of patients given electric shock treatment at risk of memory loss: Call to suspend controversial therapy," *The Sunday Post*, 27 Aug. 2023

[3] John Read, Lisa Morrison, Chris Harrop, "An independent audit of electroconvulsive therapy patient information leaflets in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales," *Psychology and Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice*, 19 July 2023 <https://doi.org/10.1111/papt.12481>, <https://bpspsychub.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/papt.12481>

[4] Marion Scott, "Expert warns half of patients given electric shock treatment at risk of memory loss: Call to suspend controversial therapy," *The Sunday Post*, 27 Aug. 2023

[5] Marion Scott, "Expert warns half of patients given electric shock treatment at risk of memory loss: Call to suspend controversial therapy," *The Sunday Post*, 27 Aug. 2023

[6] Robin McKie, "Brain damage claim leads to new row over electroshock therapy," *The Observer*, 26 June 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/jun/26/brain-damage-claim-leads-to-new-row-over-electroshock-therapy>

[7] <https://www.wisnerbaum.com/defective-medical-device-injuries/ect/>

[8] <https://www.wisnerbaum.com/defective-medical-device-injuries/ect/>

[9] <https://www.nhcaa.org/general-public/consumer-information/>

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