

Tasks for the ECT team

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This presentation outlines the role of the ECT consultant and gives some information on nursing and anaesthetic standards of practice.

The ECT consultant

- Advice and liason
- Treatment policy
- Training
- Supervision

There are four main areas of responsibility for the ECT consultant.

You will

- lead a multi-disciplinary team
- develop the ECT treatment policy
- train your junior doctors and ensure your own continued professional development
- ensure adequate continued supervision

Advice and Liason

- ECT suite and equipment
- Staffing
- Liason
- Management - clinical governance
- Audit

So what will you be asked about in terms of advice and liason?

The next seven slides expand on these headings.

Three slides list the ECT machines which were acceptable according to the standards in the 1995 handbook. The next handbook, due for publication later this year, will recommend that EEG monitoring be routinely available.

You must make sure that the junior doctor rota for ECT provides continuity; vital for training purposes and preferable in terms of patient care.

Nursing levels should be in accordance with RCN and UKCC guidelines and there should be a named anaesthetist with whom you can discuss service issues.

And do not be afraid to remind colleagues of the benefits of ECT, we know that it is an effective treatment.

ECT machines - UK

| Machine | output (mC) | control +display | | EEG |
|------------|----------------|------------------|-----|----------|
| ECTONUS 5A | 50-700 | single | yes | optional |
| ECTONUS 5B | 50-700 | single | yes | optional |
| NTS-R | 75-4455 | multiple | no | no |
| NTS-C | 60-720 | single | no | no |

This slide shows the British ECT machines available.

These are relatively cheap to buy but none has an integral real time EEG monitor. Ectron have however produced an 'add-on' monitor which records the length of EEG activity.

ECT machines - Mecta

| Machine | output (mC) | control +display | | EEG |
|-------------|-------------|------------------|-----|-----|
| JR1 | 22-1152 | multiple | yes | no |
| SR1 | 22-1152 | multiple | yes | yes |
| JR2 | 25-1200 | single | yes | no |
| SR2 | 25-1200 | single | yes | yes |
| Spectrum | | | | |
| 4000 Q or M | 5-1152 | either | yes | no |
| 5000 Q or M | 5-1152 | either | yes | yes |

Mecta is one of the two American companies which market their machines in Britain.

The four earlier models differed in terms of the output control and EEG facility.

The two most recent additions, one with and one without an EEG, are computerised with micro-chips which serve memory functions.

ECT machines - Somatics

| Machine | output (mC) | control +display | | EEG |
|------------------------|----------------|------------------|-----|----------|
| Thymatron DGx | 25-1008 | either | yes | optional |
| Thymatron system IV | 25-1008 | either | yes | yes |

The second American company is Somantics with their Thymatron models.

These two machines are flexible and can be commissioned to provide any of the stated control variables.

Again the newer models contain micro-chips with memory functions.

Nursing standards

- first level nurse responsibility
- registered nurse at each stage
- CPR competency
- escort nurse familiar and aware of legal issues and consent status
- backup easily available

National Audit of ECT in Scotland, 1997-2000.

These were the standards used in the National Audit of Electroconvulsive Therapy in Scotland, 1997-2000.

A first level nurse is a fully trained nurse, equivalent of grade D or above.

All nurses at ECT should be competent in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR).

The RCN now stipulate that in order to be fully aware of all the legal and consent issues, the accompanying nurse should also be a trained nurse.

Guidelines for Anaesthesia

- **consultant responsibility**
- **trained anaesthetists**
- **trained assistant (ODP)**
- **standard equipment**
- **ECT workup**
- **access to critical care for ASA grades 3 or above** (medical condition affecting lifestyle)

The Royal College of Anaesthetists has endorsed the above guidelines for ECT anaesthesia. These guidelines are standard for any anaesthetic given on a site remote from a general theatre.

More information is available from the Royal College of Anaesthetists website:
www.rcoa.ac.uk

Possible mode of action

- **Anticonvulsant** (1)
- **Receptor modulator** (2)
- **Neurotrophic (BDNF)** (3)
- **Changes in gene expression** (4)

1. Sackeim, The Anticonvulsant Hypothesis of the Mechanisms of Action of ECT: Current Status
2. Sattin A, The Role of TRH and Related Peptides in the Mechanism of Action of ECT
3. Krystal A & Weiner R, EEG Correlates of the Response to ECT all in The Journal of ECT vol 15 1999
4. Fochtmann LJ, Genetic approaches to the neurobiology of ECT. J of ECT 1998;14:206-19

A discussion about the mode of action of ECT can help with liaison.

Over the last five years there has been a resurgence of interest in the mechanism of ECT and two complete editions of the Journal of ECT reported on the possible mode of action as outlined in the above slide.

Advice and Liason

- ECT suite and equipment ✓
- Staffing ✓
- Liason ✓

- Management - clinical governance
- Audit

The following documents which help with clinical governance issues and audit are published on The Scottish ECT Audit Network (SEAN) website: www.sean.org.uk

- the Royal College of Psychiatrists Council Report on 'Guidelines for Commissioners of an ECT service
- audit tools as used in the National Audit of ECT in Scotland

Treatment policy

1. Role and interface between

- psychiatrists, clinical and ECT teams
- nurses
- anaesthetist(s)

2. Treatment protocols

The treatment policy is probably the main area for development because nowadays the emphasis is very much on tailoring each ECT session to the individual patient.

But first of all it is important to agree on the respective roles of the clinical and ECT teams.

Do you, as ECT consultant, aim to be a 'specialised technician' or move instead towards a shared care model becoming a 'consultant' in all senses and involved in decisions about length and even indication for treatment?

ie Who decides on the mode of ECT (uni or bilateral)

Who sets / alters the dose of electricity?

Who decides when an ECT course starts / stops?

In general it will be the clinical team who will prescribe the ECT and the ECT team who will set the dose but two way information is required for optimum effectiveness.

The ECT consultant should have the ultimate veto on who gets or is refused treatment.

Likewise the roles of the ECT nurses, ward nurses, anaesthetist(s) and ODP should be defined.

Prescription of ECT

| | high dose | low dose |
|-------------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| Bilateral | 80% efficacy s/e +++ | 70% efficacy s/e ++ |
| Unilateral | 70% efficacy but depends on dose s/e + | 30% efficacy s/e +/- |

ref: Sackeim et al. New England J of Medicine, 1993, 328:839-846
Sackeim et al. Archives of Gen Psychiatry. 2000, 57:425-434

The next six slides summarize the factors to consider in the prescription of ECT.

It is important to be aware of recent research in order to understand the underlying principles and evidence on which to base the treatment option for the individual patient.

This slide outlines the effects of the four most common forms of treatment which have been used since the 1940's.

Prescription of ECT

| | high dose | low dose |
|------------|---|-------------------------|
| Bilateral | | 70% efficacy s/e ++ |
| Unilateral | 70% efficacy <i>but</i> depends on dose s/e + | 30% efficacy s/e +/- |

ref: Sackeim et al. New England J of Medicine, 1993, 328:839-846
Sackeim et al. Archives of Gen Psychiatry. 2000, 57:425-434

High dose, bilateral ECT was the type first used when ECT was introduced.

It remained popular well into the seventies, mainly as a result of developments in anaesthesia, but because of cognitive side-effects is now not used on a routine basis.

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In the early 1980's an attempt to reduce side-effects by reducing the dose of electricity coincided with the introduction of unilateral ECT.

This type of treatment (low dose unilateral), despite producing observable seizures of at least 25 seconds, was ineffective so was abandoned.

The choice of treatment modality is therefore between low dose bilateral and high dose unilateral ECT and in making the decision account should be taken of

- degree of urgency
- severity of illness
- pre-existing cognitive problems
- patient choice (if possible)
- clinical experience

It is possible to consider a combination of UECT and BECT options in a treatment schedule eg starting with BECT and switching to UECT if there are cognitive side-effects or starting with UECT and switching to BECT if the UECT has been ineffective.

The next three slides give further information.

Bilateral ECT

Sackeim et al. (series of studies 1991 - 93, USA)

- low dose UECT - 28% response
- low dose BECT - 70% response
- same seizure length
- cognitive side-effects related to dose above seizure threshold rather than absolute dose

conclusion: best outcome when the dose exceeds seizure threshold (BECT) by 50 - 100% for a given individual

The 1995 ECT handbook recommends the use of moderately supra threshold bilateral ECT as the treatment of choice.

The work of Sackeim and others in the 1990's found that giving a dose of electricity at 1.5 to 2 times seizure threshold was the most cost-effective in terms of efficacy versus cognitive side effects.

Bilateral ECT is also technically easier to give.

Unilateral ECT

- Efficacy increases with dose above ST
- maybe up to 12 fold
- side effects increase with dose above ST
- but probably not to the extent of BECT

so

- maybe no need to measure ST?
- but technically more difficult

ref: McCall, Reboussin, Weiner, Sackeim, Titrated Moderately Suprathreshold vs fixed high dose Right Unilateral ECT, 2000, Archives of Gen Psychiatry, 57,438-444.

The studies of the 1990's had looked at unilateral ECT at 2.5 times seizure threshold and found this to be less effective than bilateral.

However unilateral ECT is now becoming the treatment of choice in many American clinics following a series of small studies which compared very high dose unilateral ECT with moderately supra threshold bilateral ECT. The suggestions are:

- that both efficacy and side-effects increase with the dose above seizure threshold
- that UECT 5-12 times seizure threshold is as effective as BECT
- that even at high doses cognitive side-effects are less troublesome than with BECT

However numbers in studies quoted so far are small and so results are inconclusive at this stage.

Given the reduction in cognitive side-effects, measurement of the seizure threshold may be less critical than with bilateral ECT but unilateral ECT is technically more difficult and involves more of a team effort to ensure correct electrode contact.

Cognitive side-effects

Time to re-orientation (minutes):

| | study 1 | study 2 |
|--------------------------|---------|---------|
| low dose uni- (ST x 1.5) | 11 | 18.7 |
| high dose uni- (ST x 5) | 19 | 30.7 |
| low dose bi- (ST x 1.5) | 37 | |
| high dose bi- (ST x 3) | 40 | 45.5 |

1. Sobin 1995, American J of Psychiatry

2. Sackeim et al. Archives, 2000, 57,425-434

3. Journal of ECT vol 16 June /00

This next slide shows more detail on the cognitive side-effects experienced in two studies using different treatment modalities and different doses of electricity at 1.5x, 3x and 5x seizure threshold.

It is important to measure post treatment confusion because this correlates with longer term memory problems. Any cognitive problem should be reported to the ECT team because this may indicate that the dose of electricity is too high. This is especially important in bilateral ECT if the seizure threshold has been estimated rather than measured.

Seizure threshold

- measure. pros: specific
therapeutic, despite seizure length
decreased risk of overdose
cons: time under anaesthetic
risks of repeated stimulation?
- estimate. pros: quick
cons: predictive factors for only 25%
risk of overdose in upto 25% so
keep starting dose low

Lets assume that bilateral ECT is being given:

The treatment dose of electricity should be about 1.5 times the patient's seizure threshold.

We therefore need to know what the patient's seizure threshold is.

There are two ways to proceed the pros and cons of which are outlined above.

The first is the more technically correct but the debate centres on whether this approach is necessary in routine clinical practice *provided* the estimated dose given assumes a seizure threshold of below 100mC ie the starting treatment dose is around 75-100mC.

Stimulus dosing protocols

- missed seizures
- partial seizures
- progressive shortening of seizure length
- prolonged seizures

All clinics should have protocols to follow in the event of 'missed' or partial seizures.

Any observation that the seizure length is shortening as the course of ECT progresses may suggest that the patient's seizure threshold is rising. This indicates a need to increase the machine output in order to maintain an adequate treatment dose.

Any seizure continuing beyond 120 seconds of motor activity or 150 seconds of EEG activity should be terminated by IV medication. It is important to decide beforehand who is responsible for this.

EEG monitoring ?

for: **direct measure**
detection of prolonged seizures
(indicator of clinical efficacy?)

against: **anxiety provoking??**
time taken
training implications

There are now published studies which report that between 0 - 6% of patients experienced a prolonged seizure on EEG monitoring that was not detected by direct observation.

Therefore for reasons of safety the next ECT handbook will recommend that EEG monitoring should be available in all clinics.

There is some early evidence suggesting that EEG changes can indicate clinical efficacy but studies need to be replicated before conclusions drawn.

Other protocols

- **Consent to treatment**
- **pre-ECT work-up**
- **record of treatment**
- **monitoring of side-effects**
- **feedback to clinical team**

Communication before and after ECT is vital.

This should involve the patient (and any advocate of their choice) and members of the ECT and clinical multi-disciplinary teams.

This list covers some of the topics.

Special populations

- **outpatients**
- **young people**
- **pregnancy**
- **cognitively impaired**

see The ECT Handbook 1995.

The ECT handbook gives advice on certain 'special populations' who might receive ECT. The revised edition of the handbook will contain expanded sections on 'day case' and maintenance ECT focusing on issues of responsibility and assessment.

Training and supervision

| % adequate: | 1981 | 1991 | 1996 | 1997 | 1999 (scotland) |
|----------------|------|------|----------|------|--------------------|
| ● training | | | 60 | 93 | 93 |
| ● supervision | 10 | ~10 | 16 | 45 | 50 |
| ● anaesthetist | 43 | 66 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| ● nurses | 35 | 66 | 'varied' | | 94 |

1. Royal College of Psychiatrists, three audit cycles, 1981, 1991, 1996

2. The National Audit of ECT in Scotland , 1997 00

This slide, from the national audits of ECT since 1981, summarises ECT staffing.

A Mental Health Act Commission survey completed in 2001 will show some improvement in England and Wales but the supervision of junior doctors is still an area of concern.

We have suffered because of a lack of dedicated time and probably the lack of importance given to ECT training. This has to change because the administration of ECT is no longer a simple operation and the consultants of tomorrow need to feel confident in making decisions about treatment options.

An accreditation system is being planned for ECT services but a much more satisfying solution for clinicians is to become involved in bringing their own service up to standard.

This is an exciting time in the development of ECT.

Scientific evidence confirms the efficacy of ECT, it is now up to us to make sure that it is given effectively.

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