

Electroconvulsive Therapy and Other Modalities Managing Bipolar Illness

ECT, commonly known as Electroconvulsive Therapy, is recommended for people who suffer with mental illness. It has been known specifically to be very effective with people who suffer with bipolar illness. ECT therapy is an electric current that passes through the head and causes seizures in the brain. It has been proven to be the quickest way to halt mania or severe depression. Also, it may be recommended if the patient is unable to wait for the his/her medication to take effect. Prior to the treatments, the patient is put under anesthesia and given a muscle relaxant. It is known that this therapy does not work with everyone, however, under extreme circumstances some feel it is necessary. The patient is monitored very carefully in case problems arise when the treatment is taking place. There are some side effects that are possible, for example, confusion, muscle aches, headaches and nausea. The symptoms, unfortunately, can last in some cases for days.

After researching the treatment, knowing that there may be a period of memory loss, I knew in my own mind at that moment I would never subject myself to such treatment. ECT has a sketchy past. It was first introduced in the 30s, and was named "electroshock." The treatment many times caused bodily harm. At the time, many believed that it was more harmful to the body, and it was only in modern times has it been improved and become helpful for a modality in treating mental illness. At this point in time many Mental Associations support the use of this technique. ECT is utilized in the treatment of bipolar disorder, major depression and schizophrenia. There are two types of ECT, unilateral and bilateral. Presently, the procedure is safe enough to be used for pregnant and older adults.

Another technique similar to ECT is TMS (Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation.) The procedure causes magnetic fields to stimulate nerve cells in the brain. This technique must be performed by a doctor who has been highly trained in the procedure. Unlike ECT, it is not used with people who have depression, bipolar, suicidal tendencies or psychosis. This procedure has similar side effects as ECT. VNS (Vagus Nerve Stimulation) is another stimulant that is utilized for people with mental illness. It is a pulse generator that is a lot smaller than ECT and TMS equipment. Unlike other techniques, the pulse generator is placed on the upper side of the chest. Some of the side effects are the following; muscle contractions, headaches and seizures. VNS is controversial and rarely used. Unlike ECT and TMS, additional side effects are shown to be concerning at times, for example, voice changes, coughs, and breathing heavily while moderately exercising.

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