



Coalition Against Psychiatric Assault
c/o Dr. Bonnie Burstow, Chairperson
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March 1, 2009

The Honourable David Caplan
Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
80 Grosvenor St, 10th Floor, Hepburn Block
Toronto ON
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Dear Minister David Caplan,

We are writing as concerned citizens about the Ontario government's ongoing sponsorship of electroshock therapy (ECT). The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (2001-2002) reports that electroshock therapy is being administered 11, 000 times per year to inpatients in Ontario. We are aware that electroshock is being used more frequently than this statistic indicates, as the number of treatments administered to outpatients in Ontario is not available. This use of electroshock is of grave concern to Canadian citizens, given that current research demonstrates that electroshock therapy causes many kinds of damage, including physical damage that leads to memory loss, intellectual impairment, the creation of neuropathology, and in some cases, death.

We call on the government to ban the practice of electroshock in Ontario. Furthermore, we urge the government to declare an immediate moratorium on electroshock administered to women and the elderly. In Ontario and elsewhere, women and the elderly are the primary targets of electroshock, with women representing approximately 70% of people who are subjected to electroshock, with over half of all people administered electroshock being women over sixty years of age. Given the disproportionate damage being done to the brains of women and the elderly (see Sackeim et al.'s (2007) study below which shows that women and the elderly are more damaged by electroshock), it is urgent that the government takes immediate action to protect them from this intervention. We also implore you to immediately investigate the electroshocking of children in Ontario, given the alarming increase in the electroshocking of children in various parts of the world.

Our demands are based in part on current research that demonstrates conclusively that electroshock is ineffective for alleviating depression in the long-term and causes significant brain damage and emotional distress. We principally refer you to the following three recent sources, which we have enclosed with this letter for your reference:

- 1) Sackeim, H., Prudic, J., Fuller, R., Keilp, J., Lavori, P. & Ofson, M. (2007). The cognitive effects of electroconvulsive therapy in community settings. *Neuropsychopharmacology*, 32, 244-254.

This is the largest study conducted in electroshock history examining the cognitive effects of ECT. The results establish to a level of statistical significance and therefore conclusively that every form of electroshock causes lasting memory and cognitive dysfunction, as well as permanent brain damage. The results also demonstrate that ECT causes more severe cognitive impairment and memory loss for women and the elderly, which raises serious concerns, given the disproportionate number of women and the elderly being subjected to this procedure.

- 2) Breggin, P. (2007, April 1). Disturbing news for patients and shock doctors alike. *The Huffington Post*. www.huffingtonpost.com

In this article, Dr. Peter Breggin offers an interpretation of Sackeim et al.'s (2007) recent study. He describes the actual impact of memory loss and impaired cognitive functioning on the lives of electroshock survivors, which Sackeim and his colleagues failed to address in their discussion of findings.

- 3) Ross, C.A. (2006). The sham ECT literature: Implications for consent to ECT. *Ethical Human Psychology and Psychiatry* 8(1), 17-28.

This is an up-to-date review of placebo-controlled literature on electroshock therapy. Ross (2006) determines that no study has demonstrated a significant difference between real and placebo ECT at one month post-treatment.

These current findings are sufficiently alarming and conclusive to require the Ministry to act even if the Ministry were not obliged by their own previous efforts. We would like to point out, however, that there was an Electro-Convulsive Therapy Review Committee, which was formed by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, which reported back in 1985. (See Charles J. Clark, Chairman, Report of the Electro-Convulsive Therapy Review Committee, December 1985). The committee made a number of recommendations, most of which were never acted upon. Even without the conclusive studies that exist today, the committee stated that unless all of the recommendations were enacted, a serious case could be made for the abolition of electroshock.

After years of grassroots protests against electroshock therapy, it is time that government and health officials listen to the urgent concerns of electroshock survivors and other concerned citizens. The Coalition Against Psychiatric Assault is currently undertaking an educational campaign to help inform government officials and the public about the devastating effects of ECT. Along with other groups throughout the world, we will be demonstrating against electroshock on Mother's Day, May 10, 2009. We have named this demonstration, *Stop Shocking Our Mothers and Grandmothers!*, to draw attention to the fact that electroshock is most often administered to elderly women and is currently being touted as a treatment of choice for postpartum depression. At this demonstration, electroshock survivors will be invited to speak about their experiences. We would of course be delighted if representatives from the government would come and hear that testimony.

Given the severe brain damage caused by electroshock therapy, the Ontario government should not be endorsing this procedure as a legitimate medical intervention expected to improve people's lives. The minds of vulnerable people are not expendable, and it is time that the government takes a stand against the dangerous practice of ECT.

We thank you for your consideration. We are hoping to hear from you at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Dr. Bonnie Burstow, Chairperson of the Coalition Against Psychiatric Assault (CAPA)

Shaindl Diamond, Ph.D. Candidate, Executive Member of CAPA

Don Weitz, Executive Member of CAPA