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**RE Official information request CDHB 10316**

We refer to your email dated 11 May 2020 to the Ministry of Health which they have subsequently partially transferred to us on 21 May 2020 requesting the following information from Canterbury DHB under the Official Information Act. Specifically question 1 below.

- 1. Given that Electroconvulsive Treatment has been used as a method of torture historically in New Zealand, can you please inform me of the precise number of these devices in NZ hospitals in present time?**

Electroconvulsive Treatment is used by Canterbury DHB solely as a therapeutic treatment for people with severe mental health conditions and only under strict conditions. Please find attached as **Appendix 1** information provided by the Canterbury DHB for consumers and family-whanāu.

Within the Canterbury DHB there are four machines. Two are in Specialist Mental Health Services and two in the Older Persons Health Service.

One machine on each site is the primary machine. The other is only used as a backup machine if there are issues with the primary machine.

I trust that this satisfies your interest in this matter.

Please note that this response, or an edited version of this response, may be published on the Canterbury DHB website after your receipt of this response.

Yours sincerely



Carolyn Gullery  
**Executive Director**  
**Planning, Funding & Decision Support**

# Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT)

## Information for consumers and family-whānau

### What is Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT)?

ECT is a procedure used to treat certain severe mental health conditions. ECT is usually considered only when other treatments, such as antidepressant medication or talking therapies, have not been effective. It is most often used to treat severe depression, but can be used to treat other mental health conditions such as bipolar disorder or schizophrenia.

### How does ECT work?

ECT stimulates the brain electrically to induce a seizure. Scientists are unsure how it works but ECT appears to produce many changes in the chemistry and functioning of the brain.

ECT has been known to work more quickly than other treatments. With the usual course of ECT it may take 6–12 treatments for a person to feel better, although some people may require more treatments to achieve maximum improvement.

### The ECT procedure

ECT is carried out by doctors assisted by registered nurses. It takes place (usually on Tuesday and Friday) in a specially designated procedure room. Before your treatment starts, we will check your physical health. This will include an electrocardiograph (ECG), a blood test, memory test and maybe a chest x-ray.

During the treatment you will be asked to lie on a bed.

- The doctor will clean the areas of your head used in the procedure and apply small adhesive pads to deliver and monitor the treatment.
- A needle will be inserted into a vein in the back of your hand, and an anaesthetic medication will be administered to put you to sleep for about ten minutes.
- Oxygen will be given through a face mask before and after the anaesthetic.
- A muscle-relaxing medication will be administered while you are asleep. When your muscles are relaxed, an electrical stimulus is briefly applied to your head to stimulate a brief artificial seizure.
- When the seizure is over, you will be taken to the recovery area where trained staff will take care of you until you are awake. This takes about 20 minutes. You will then be taken to the waiting area where the nurse will make sure you are comfortable and offer you something to eat and drink.

### Support during ECT

Family-whānau and support people may accompany you to the ECT suite however we ask that children are not brought in. One person may remain with you until you are asleep and can then wait in the waiting room until you are awake again. In exceptional circumstances this person may remain during treatment and/or recovery by agreement of the medical and nursing teams.

## After the procedure

After treatment you must have a responsible adult with you for 24 hours, until the anaesthetic has completely worn off.

You and your family-whānau will be given a brochure titled “Discharge after a general anaesthetic” which has information to help you with your recovery.

## Risks and side effects of ECT

ECT is one of the lowest risk procedures undertaken with general anaesthetic.

- Some people get headache after the procedure. Pain medication, like paracetamol, usually helps.
- Some people may experience confusion after waking from ECT but this usually resolves in an hour or so.
- A few people may experience memory problems but these are not generally permanent and usually disappear over the days or weeks following the end of an ECT course.

## Positive effects of ECT

Most people with depression experience significant improvement with a course of ECT and can return to the activities they previously enjoyed. Occasionally ongoing maintenance treatment may be necessary.

## Other treatment possibilities

ECT is not the only option for severe depression. Other options include medication or talking therapies. Your doctor will discuss with you the advantages and disadvantages of the various therapy options.

## Consent

Your doctor will discuss with you and your family-whānau or support person what ECT involves and why you have been offered it. They will answer any questions about the treatment. Before commencing ECT, your doctor will ask you to sign a consent form that records that ECT has been explained to you and that you understand the procedure, the side effects and risks.

You can refuse or withdraw your consent at any time. Withdrawing your consent to ECT will not affect your right to continue treatment or to try other treatments.

## What if I am too ill to consent?

Very occasionally, if a person is particularly unwell, ECT may need to be given without their consent. For this to happen, two psychiatrists must agree that the person is so unwell that ECT is an essential treatment and the person would need to be under the Mental Health (Compulsory Assessment and Treatment) Act. A District Inspector, who is a specially trained solicitor, will assist you and discuss your rights.

***Please discuss this information with your family-whānau or support person, and discuss any questions or concerns with your doctor.***

## More information about ECT

DVD: “Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT) in New Zealand: What you and your family and whānau need to know”. Ministry of Health DVD

Leaflet: “Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT) in New Zealand: What you and your family and whānau need to know”. Ministry of Health 2009