

Book Review

Michael H. Ebert, M.D., Editor

Electroconvulsive Therapy, 4th ed.

by Richard Abrams, M.D. Oxford University Press, Oxford, United Kingdom, 2002, 328 pages, \$62.50.

This volume is a fourth edition of a classic and important textbook in psychiatry. The first edition was published in 1988, and subsequent editions were published in 1992 and 1997.

To say that electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) is important to psychiatric practice is to understate the role of this therapy and its evolution over the past 50-plus years. This 13-chapter book discusses what anyone would like to know about ECT, from its history to its efficacy and side effects. Issues such as the potential for brain damage, as well as mechanisms for ECT are addressed. An added chapter to this edition on repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulation therapy reviews the treatment and compares it with ECT for treatment of depression.

A book of this kind is really to be used as a reference. When reviewing these kinds of editions, I first look at the index to determine if topics of interest to me are included. In this case, I particularly looked up the information about lithium and ECT, since ECT during lithium treatment can produce a delirium, and I wanted to make sure that was covered—it indeed was. Second, I look at the reference list to determine if references are up-to-date. This volume was published in 2002; references are through 2001, and one is cited as “in press.” Thus, the referencing is quite current. Third, I review the content and the chapters for delivery of information and readability. In both areas, Dr. Abrams passed the test masterfully. He is an excellent writer and is very thorough in his discussions of ECT-related topics.

This excellent text is a complete synopsis of the current status of ECT and an important volume to be aware of. It is quite useful for psychiatric residents and mental health practitioners who either perform ECT or refer patients for this treatment. The more knowledge the clinician has about the facts of this treatment, the more likely a patient will accept the referral. We do have considerable evidence about both the efficacy and side effects of ECT. It is important to present all this material in a condensed form to patients who are contemplating ECT as a means of improving their psychiatric condition.

Dr. Abrams, in his preface, indicates that there have been more than 1000 articles on ECT published since the previous edition, as well as almost 500 articles on the psychiatric use of repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulation therapy. It is interesting that ECT research has seemingly increased recently and perhaps ECT utilization has at least been relatively stable throughout the years in spite of the increase in antidepressant prescriptions in the United States. Perhaps the increased utilization of ECT is a natural consequence of detecting more cases of depression and that clinicians will also, therefore, detect more treatment-resistant patients who are thus suitable for referral to ECT.

I congratulate my colleague, Dr. Abrams, for putting together an excellent textbook.

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