

January 28, 1988

Mrs. Edward M. Bigler
40 Doubling Road
Greenwich, CT 06380

Dear Mrs. Bigler,

Thank you for your request that I participate in the Phil Donahue show.

Beginning with the appearance of the New Yorker article by Berton Rouché "As Empty as Eve" in 1974, and my subsequent work with the APA Task Force on Electroconvulsive Therapy, I have actively assessed the merits and limitations of the ECT process. What may have been a debate in the 1970s, as to the merits of the treatment, has been resolved by the many assessments by individuals and international commissions and committees, culminating in the 1985 NIH Consensus Conference. The question of ECT efficacy is resolved. Until a more effective and safer treatment for the serious mentally ill is devised and tested, ECT remains a useful and needed treatment. That is not a matter of public debate, either by the Phil Donahues or the Opreh Winfreys of the entertainment world.

Indeed, the acceptance by laymen that there is a 'debate' on efficacy and safety plays into the hands of the anti-psychiatry lobby. There is no more reason for a debate by the laity on TV or radio of the merits of ECT than it would be reasonable for a debate on the merits of insulin in diabetes or penicillin in neurosyphilis or any other technical medical therapy.

In the face of the anti-psychiatry lobby, there is a need for public education, but in proper fora. For that reason, my associates and I were responsive to the requests by Susan Squire for an opportunity to meet treated patients before she wrote the November 22, 1987 article in the New York Times Magazine; and why we have been cooperative with the PBS/BBC producers of the series MIND, to appear later this year.

We continue to seek to improve the delivery of mental health services, and my present missions support this aim for ECT. I wrote my review of ECT in 1979, launched the journal CONVULSIVE THERAPY in 1985, and have developed a training program in ECT at SUNY at Stony Brook in the past year.

But I will not cooperate with a 'show', surely not one of the kind produced by Phil Donahue under the guise of a 'debate' or a 'balanced' presentation. But if I can help you present the facts of ECT history and present practice in educational venues, please call on me. I enclose articles that may be of interest, as well as a description of CONVULSIVE THERAPY.

Sincerely yours,

Max Fink, M.D.

cc: Donald Klein, M.D.