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May 28, 1976

Dear Dr. Goldfarb,

Enclosed is the reprint you requested. The problem that you addressed at the APA is an important one, deserving of the detailed and controlled studies which have become the hallmark of recent research efforts in this country.

The burden of my remarks was in part occasioned by the hearings that the APA Task Force on Convulsive Therapy held earlier that week. We heard from a number of EST practitioners that they were uniquely successful in treating thousands of patients without succinylcholine, barbiturate or anesthesia, without memory loss or other discomfort, without missed seizures or panic or failure of patients to return to treatment. In line with that experience, your anecdotal report seemed to be of the same nature-- observations without a comparison or control group, and without evidence in the report of detailed attention to the problems of consent by psychiatrically ill to procedures that are clearly experimental. Further, since you were willing to push the limits of the number of seizures beyond those in the literature, it seems essential that peer review of the protocol be included in the report. If there was peer review, then a comparison group would have been essential; its lack suggested that peer review was cursory and perfunctory-- surely not acceptable in a procedure as potentially damaging as induced seizures.

One other point-- your text suggested that the increased frequency of seizures was an attempt on your part to reduce hospitalization in a situation where you were overwhelmed by a large number of patients and an inadequate number of personnel to care for them. This is an inadequate justification for a research effort unless duration of hospitalization and aftercare are part of the project. In the report, the use of drugs after and during EST seemed uncontrolled and therefore to nullify the significance of your observations.

There is need for a controlled study of multiple EST, and I hope that you will undertake such an effort-- with regular EST as a comparison group, peer review of the protocol, and consent procedures that are well defined. Good luck !

Sincerely yours,

Max Fink, M.D.  
Professor of Psychiatry