

July 14, 1992

William T. Donner, M.D.
Abington Memorial Hospital
Abington, PA 19001

Dear Dr. Donner,

The concern with 'informed consent' for ECT was first reviewed by the APA in the 1978 Task Force report. It was reviewed again in its 1990 report. In both, a balance between the facts as known and the mis-perceptions of the public were considered. Memory complaints are mostly reported by patients who have not improved with treatment. Objective evidence of memory impairment is rare, especially in the past decade with the introduction of the routine use of continuous ventilation with oxygen, brief pulse currents, graded electrical dosing, selective electrode placement, variations in frequency of treatments, and duration of course. We have also come to realize that the usual associated treatments, like lithium, benzodiazepines, and tricyclic antidepressants, which are often used as continuation treatments, do themselves impair cognition and memory functions.

The best documentation of the present state of knowledge on long term effects of ECT is found in the 1990 APA Task Force report, and in the second edition of *Electroconvulsive Therapy* by Richard Abrams (Oxford University Press, New York, 1992). The older experience is best summarized in *Convulsive Therapy: Theory and Practice* which I wrote (Raven Press, New York, 1979) and the first APA Task Force report (#14, APA, Washington, D.C., 1978). Each publication contains a useful model consent form.

Much of the concern with memory effects of ECT is sustained in the public by the hysteria of the Church of Scientology. Present concerns are not with the form, but with the consent process. Many clinicians now use a videotape describing the ECT procedure to educate the patients and their family. Commercial videotapes are available from Somatics and from MECTA, the principal manufacturers of modern brief pulse ECT devices.

A lengthy consideration of competency to consent was recently published in *Convulsive Therapy* (8:92-102, 1992).

Sincerely yours,

Max Fink, M.D.
Editor