

April 19, 1991

Dr. J.A.G. Watt
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1055 Great Western Road
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United Kingdom

Dear Dr. Watt,

You suggest that two groups be studied, one of major depressed of the mild type and another of dysthymia of 6 months to 2 years duration. Alas, you will not be justified to use ECT in either population. For depressives of mild type, you will surely exclude those with melancholia, psychosis, and suicidality -- precisely the best candidates for ECT. As for dysthymics, such as are identifiable are those who are chronically ill, for durations measured in years or decades, and who in the older days, were identified as 'neurotic' or 'reactive' depressed. Surely, not candidates for ECT.

ECT remains a treatment for severely ill patients, those who are hospitalized or who warrant hospitalization. Any study which suggests its use in those with lesser degrees of illness will be difficult, in our society at least.

As for power calculations, these are quite easy. If delusional depressed are selected, the success with ECT will be 60-80%, with any antidepressant alone, less than 30%; a power calculation will find about 30 patients in each cell will do nicely.

Good luck in your studies.

Sincerely yours,

Max Fink, M.D.
Professor of Psychiatry