

September 9, 1983

Gregory Teas, M.D.
Alexian Brothers Medical Center
800 West Biesterfield Road
Elk Grove Village, IL 60007

Dear Dr. Teas,

The established recommendations for ECT are those that have been published by the APA Task Force on Electroconvulsive Therapy (1978). There are other guidelines in my book (Fink, M.: Convulsive Therapy: Theory and Practice, Raven Press, New York, 1979) and a recent British manual (Fraser, M.: ECT: A Clinical Guide, John Wiley, New York, 1982). Unfortunately, none answer your questions for maintenance ECT or out-patient ECT.

It is generally assumed that courses of ECT will begin in a hospital setting, where a pre-treatment spine x-ray and ECG are recommended. There are no 'laboratory' tests that are pre-requisite to a course of ECT, although all guides suggest that a medical 'clearance' be obtained, and presumably this will include such routine laboratory tests as CBC, urinalysis, and SMA 12.

During a course of ECT, ECG records are often repeated if the patient's medical condition warrants — where cardiovascular disease is pre-existent and where the treatments are marked by cardiovascular events. Spine x-rays are rarely repeated but may be if the patient complains of back pain or if there is a remarkably 'violent' treatment experience.

I see no reason to change these guidelines for patients maintained on treatments at home.

For a more definitive answer, I suggest you address your request to Melvin Sabshin, M.D., the Medical Director of the APA. It was the recommendation of the APA Task Force that a permanent committee on ECT be maintained by the APA to answer inquiries such as yours. If enough members write with their questions, perhaps this recommendation will be implemented.

Sincerely yours,

Max Fink, M.D.
Professor of Psychiatry