

October 20, 1986

Alan J. Gelenberg, M.D.
Psychiatrist-in-Chief
The Arbour
49 Robinwood Avenue
Jamaica Plain, MA 02130

Dear Alan,

A friend who attended the recent Harvard course in psychopharmacology shared the syllabus with me, when he told me of how he pleased he was with the course. In reading some of the sections, I came across your notes regarding NMS and was surprised to find that you included ECT among the less accepted treatments for this disorder.

It is my understanding that ECT has been used, apparently successfully, in treating NMS. It is usual that ECT is a treatment of last resort, so that it is not unexpected that there has been one death associated with its use (as you note). But there have also been successes. In a recent extensive review (Pearlman, C. J. clin. Psychopharm 6: 257-273, 1986) the author gives nine citations to favorable outcomes and two to unfavorable (page 268). In the table, ECT is cited as useful in 10 cases, negative in one, and equivocal in two. In the uncontrolled reports cited to date, ECT is as useful as other suggested interventions.

Harvard students deserve the best data.

My best regards.

Sincerely yours,

Max Fink, M.D.
Professor of Psychiatry