

F: letters  
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August 11, 1975

Mr. Edward H. Meyer  
135 Godfrey Road  
Fairfield, Conn. 06430

Dear Mr. Meyer,

Thank you for your inquiry and for letting me know that my comments have been quoted in the Bridgeport Post.

The memory loss which has been described in some patients receiving ECT can be reduced by a number of maneuvers: the proper selection of patients for treatment to include only those with depressive psychoses; the proper placement of treatment electrodes; and the treatment of those patients who do experience memory difficulty with new, memory enhancing peptides which are now in experimental study. It is not clear from your letter whether you are asking about treatments to be given (where prevention is available) or treatments that have been given (where therapy is limited).

Treatment for any illness is not always effective, and so it is with convulsive therapy. In comparative studies of ECT and drugs, the treatment results, even accounting for memory effects, are uniformly better for certain types of illness than when these patients are treated by drugs or psychotherapy.

I do not know what declarations others may make; in my laboratory patients and their family members are advised as to the limitations and possible advantages of any treatment we may undertake, and consent is obtained from patients and their kin.

Medical custom is a much stronger inducement to medical practice and behavior than your reference 'under law' since the law is what the courts and lawyers wish it to be; medical practice is responsive to the ethical standards and morality of the community in which a physician serves, and the hazards and pressures of the informed and uninformed vocal laity.

I trust these comments are responsive.

Sincerely yours,

Max Fink, M. D.  
Professor of Psychiatry

MF/mr