

News Release

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BLACK DOG INSTITUTE



ECT MOST POWERFUL TREATMENT FOR DEPRESSION

The practice of Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT) is political, highly controversial and the most powerful treatment for people suffering severe mood disorders, according to internationally renowned researcher, Professor Harold Sackeim.

Professor Sackeim was delivering the fourth Black Dog International Lecture on the subject of *Key Issues in the Practice of ECT*.

He is Professor, Department of Psychiatry and Radiology, College of Physicians and Surgeons at Columbia University in the United States and is regarded as the leading international expert on ECT.

Professor Sackeim told a packed audience in the Institute's lecture theatre that there had been a dramatic improvement over the years in ECT treatment and how it is administered. "It is the most effective treatment for mood disorders and we are doing away with a lot of its cognitive side effects," he told the audience that included many Australian psychiatrists.

"There are new physical capabilities to shape current density paths to target particular neural regions that provide a remarkable degree of accuracy which limits side effects," he said.

Professor Sackeim predicted a "very bright future" in the use of ECT as a treatment for mood disorders. He said his database on ECT now exceeded 14,000 publications, indicating it was extremely well studied.

ECT, he said, was the grandmother or grandfather of one of 10 different forms of brain stimulation for psychiatric illness.

Professor Sackeim said electrode placement was a key to effective ECT treatment and it was now possible to produce reliable seizures of the brain with minimal side effects.

"Where you put electrodes on the head affected the amount of amnesia in the patient," he said.

"Patients vary widely on how much electricity they need to produce a seizure."

Professor Sackeim said patients receiving ECT today are likely to be around 50 years old, fairly well educated and predominantly female (63.6 percent). Twenty percent had bipolar disorder.

He said that without continuation of ECT therapy, virtually all patients would suffer a relapse within six months of receiving the treatment. Relapse could be reduced with use of the antidepressant and mood stabiliser drugs.

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