



Countywide Services Agency

Department of
Health and Human Services

Mental Health Services

Dorian Kittrell, MFT
Executive Director
Mental Health Treatment Center

May 27, 2008

Sandy Damiano, PhD
Chief, Adult Mental Health Services
Sacramento County Division of Mental Health

Dear Dr. Damiano:

I strongly urge the Division to continue to have electro-convulsive therapy (ECT) as a treatment alternative available to the clients served by the Division. Some of the rationale is as follows.

- ECT is the most highly regulated treatment currently used in psychiatry.
- In the majority of cases of ECT in Sacramento County, and in essentially every case of ECT at the Mental Health Treatment Center, California law requires that the case be reviewed by three different psychiatrists and the patient's attorney before the treatment can be administered. In the review process, if any of the four disagree, then either the treatment is not given or a judge must weigh the evidence and decide.
- ECT at the Treatment Center has been life-saving for some patients so severely depressed or catatonic that they cannot eat/drink and have had to make multiple trips to local hospital emergency rooms to be medically treated for dehydration and malnutrition.
- ECT works quickly, usually producing significant improvement within a week or two, and allows the patient to leave the hospital weeks earlier than might otherwise be possible.
- For elderly, frail patients, ECT can be medically safer than extended medication trials of multiple medications with compounded side effects.
- There are some patients for whom ECT is the only effective treatment that allows them to live in the community.
- At the Treatment Center, ECT is always a treatment of last resort for the most severely ill patients with Major Depression, usually with psychosis, or with catatonia (psychotic immobility).
- Removing ECT as a therapeutic option for Sacramento County patients would cause harm and impose undue suffering for those severely ill patients who would otherwise be able to be recovering in the community.

Please do not hesitate to let me know if I can provide additional information on this matter.

Sincerely,

Martin Leamon, MD
Medical Director
Associate Professor of Clinical Psychiatry
University of California, Davis

Terry Schutten, County Executive
Penelope Clarke, Agency Administrator
Lynn Frank, Department Director
Leland Tom, Division Director

County of
Sacramento