

What thoughts do you have about how to overcome the stigma of ECT?

Dr. McCall:

Overcoming the negative stigma of ECT requires openness on the part of patients who've received it to talk about how it's helped them. Unfortunately, there's not too many yet, but there are some testimonials out there that hopefully will be searchable on the internet if someone was trying to find out what patients themselves had to say about it.

Psychiatrists need to also stand up for ECT, and when lies are told — and lies are often told about ECT for a variety of reasons that these are forcefully countered. And then I think also is understanding that ECT is a straightforward medical treatment. The target is the brain as opposed to the heart. But of course, we use electricity to cardiovert people. So it bears some similarities to cardioversion, and there's no stigma for cardioversion. The brain just happens to be a different target organ. Understanding that the condition that's being treated — and we're talking about catatonia today — is in fact, I would call catatonia a neuropsychiatric medical condition. It doesn't fall entirely within psychiatry. It's as much as we've spoken earlier, it could stand on its own as its own diagnosis and arguably as a medical diagnosis, in addition to whatever psychiatric condition might be attached in any given patient.

So I think we need to move towards conceptualizing ECT as a medical procedure, as opposed to a psychiatric procedure, and understanding that when it's used to treat catatonia, we're treating a neuropsychiatric condition, which is largely medical.