



Can you share any remarkable recoveries?

Dr. Ghaziuddin:

I'd like to share some remarkable recoveries involving my patients, and obviously without using any specific information that would identify them.

This was one of my first patients who I started treating maybe 18, 19, 20 years ago, I think. At that time, he was about 13 or 14 years old and he had autism, intellectual disability, and he had become increasingly more impulsive. Aggressive both to himself and to other people, he had lost his skills. So there were many features of catatonia. And at that stage, we used to be nervous about using ECT. It was a big deal. This is now almost 20 years ago. It was a big deal, and in the state of Michigan, we have to get consensus from three psychiatrists. We were considering, "Are we going to do it? Are we not going to do it? Are we going to find two other psychiatrists who will agree?"

I remember there was a breaking point for me. This child's father came and wept in front of me. He had a broken nose and his shirt was bloodied up. And I looked at him and it was because the child had headbutted him, broken his nose, and he was badly bruised and needed treatment, and his clothes were bloodied. So anyway, it shook me. It was like, "I can't ignore this. I can't hesitate. I have to make a strong case." And we did eventually get consensus among three clinicians and we were able to proceed with ECT.

This young man—obviously his autism has not gone away. His intellectual disability has not gone away. But over two decades, maybe over the last two and a half decades, it's allowed him to live at home with loving parents. I think eventually he will go into a group home facility kind of situation as his parents age, but not because of his behavior or symptoms.

His ability to take care of himself has improved. There's been no aggression, no self injurious behavior. I think we restored his life. That was one remarkable recovery.

Another remarkable story is a more recent one. I had seen a young woman who was in her late 20s when I saw her. She had autism, intellectual disability, and a variety of other developmental delays, who had in the previous 10 years—so I think when she was probably a teen—had developed symptoms that were very consistent with catatonia: She was walking differently. She was not able to do things that she could do before. Her walking was abnormal. She would have periods of agitation when she would scream for hours. It was described as hollering that would go on all night.

This story also actually has a hormone aspect to it. When she was presented to us, the parent's understanding was—that had been supported by their OBGYN—that there was a mid-cycle

worsening—and there was indeed—that coincided with her period. So her periods were very painful. And if we could do a hysterectomy, remove her ovaries and uterus—and she was, mind you, she was in her 20s—then maybe the condition could be fixed. Then she might be cured.

The other interesting and sort of medical complication that was going on was they were using over-the-counter painkillers to an amount that would be considered toxic. These were two medical aspects of her presentation. And our understanding was that this agitation, it probably does get worse around periods—this discomfort that she experiences. But she is dysregulated throughout the month. This is not exclusive around periods, so it can't be explained as menstrual pain.

The other medical aspect of this young woman's presentation was that she was receiving these huge amounts of NSAIDs. It would harm her liver and, depending on what she was receiving, eventually her kidneys.

She had a variety of symptoms that were consistent with catatonia. We started her on electroconvulsive therapy. She's had it for a few years now.

Her parents had at that point, thankfully—as had the OBGYN—agreed to postpone the surgery that she never needed. They never had to go back to that option. The aggression result, the eating improved, the walking improved, the screaming episodes are gone—zero—from screaming all night—it didn't happen overnight—but slowly they are completely gone. Her mother very proudly told me that they are no longer giving her those unacceptable doses of over-the-counter pain medications—they're not needed anymore. Just a remarkable recovery. So these two stand out.