

What would you like patients and providers to know about ECT?

Dr. Caroff:

Unfortunately, I don't think public perceptions of ECT really are consistent with the reality of ECT. There's this long tradition in the public media and social media of what ECT may have been like a hundred years ago when treatment procedures were primitive and our understanding of it wasn't great and it was abused.

And unfortunately, that stigma has continued and perpetuated when the reality of ECT is a very modern, safe, quick procedure that can be done totally safely in the vast majority of patients and highly effective in the selected cases where it's indicated. So from my experience and many others, we know that people with severe forms of depression or even mania, which is less often treated this way nowadays, but certainly for people with severe melancholic depression and catatonia, ECT is highly effective and very safe. So it's frustrating, but I think it has to be addressed by people like you and The Catatonia Foundation by simply getting the facts out there.

The reality, the scientific data, it's been studied in controlled trials using state-of-the-art contemporary research standards, showing that it works and it's safe. But unfortunately, there's this stigma associated probably from decades and decades from years ago that's persisted.

The only way to counter that is through education and getting the data out there. And very much so personal stories. It's so powerful if patients and families feel confident and okay with publicizing the stories of therapeutic success. So there has to be information, reality, facts, and science, as the best way to counter misunderstanding and stigma about ECT.

And in the malignant catatonia case, that's doubly important. A lot of medical people — this affects medical people as well — they're often not informed, or they have misunderstandings about ECT, especially in these emergent cases with physical signs and symptoms where ECT can also be dramatically lifesaving. So we gotta get the word out there.