

What's your understanding of how ECT works?

Alyssa Phillips:

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Dr. Fink:

Well, every seizure produces a marked change in the body that usually affects the hormones of the brain directly.

In the 1970s, physicians developed a test for hormones that are called the adrenal hormones, and this test, which is called the dexamethasone suppression test, had an interesting relationship to ECT.

The physician who developed the test had patients who were severely depressed. He did the dexamethasone suppression test before he treated them, and their test was abnormal. He treated them with ECT, and they recovered. And after the recovery, he repeated the test, and the test was now normal.

In the next few months of his work, when he published the story, he had two patients who came back who were sick again. They were severely depressed. They were melancholic depressed, and he re-treated them. As melancholic depressed, their tests were abnormal. So this test is a test for the depressed form of psychosis.

I think the effect of every seizure is to change the endocrine system, and you can measure that by different endocrine measures. The surprising thing to me is that much of medicine by many of the physicians who treat patients just do not study the endocrines. I published a report on the endocrine basis for ECT in 1981.