

Improving Medical Students' Knowledge and Attitudes towards Electroconvulsive Therapy

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Background: Stigma largely remains surrounding the use of electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) despite its proven safety and efficacy in treating a range of psychiatric disease like refractory affective illness and schizophrenia. Negative perceptions of the procedure are still held by many healthcare professionals including psychologists, nurses and medical students. It is therefore vital any misconception is adequately addressed and challenged. Negative attitudes towards ECT could impact patient management plans and result in patients foregoing this life-saving intervention.

Objective: This research aims to identify how medical students learn about ECT, how this shapes their perceptions, and what could be done to improve their knowledge and attitudes on the procedure.

Methods: APA PsychInfo and MEDLINE databases were searched on 18/07/2023. Articles were screened for suitability and reporting was done in accordance with PRISMA. Information has been obtained from six different primary research articles.

Results: Popular media, notably film and television are frequently reported as students in earlier years of studies' principal source of information – or misinformation, despite its known sensationalised inaccuracies. Senior medical students are more knowledgeable on the treatment and are therefore more likely to have positive attitudes compared to their junior counterparts, citing formal teaching, videos, scientific journals, observing and partaking in live ECT sessions as valuable learning sources.

Conclusion: Most depictions of ECT in popular culture are exaggerated, disturbing and very misleading. By incorporating ECT into the medical curriculum, stigmatising attitudes are greatly reduced in this cohort, hopefully leading to better outcomes for patients in the future.

