

Electroshocking children in Australia

There are 7 items in this posting:

1. Introductory paragraph
2. Peter R. Breggin - article
3. Bruce E Levine - article
4. Fred A. Baughman Jr. - letter to the editor
5. Baughman - addendum
6. Eleni Hale - complete article in *Herald Sun*
7. Two readers' comments about Hale's article on the *Herald Sun's* site

1. On January 25, a Melbourne newspaper published an article about electroshock (electroconvulsive treatment, ECT) use in Victoria, a state in southeastern Australia. Among other facts, it reported that children under 14 years of age, including some who were 4 years old and younger, underwent 203 ECT "treatments" in 2007-2008. Health professionals usually ignore such horrific news, but this time three professionals have responded with two important articles and a thoughtful letter to the editor denouncing this practice and the use of ECT in general. In addition, two readers of the original article have condemned the electroshocking of children in comments posted on the paper's site.

2. Psychiatrist Peter R. Breggin's "Electroshock for Children and Involuntary Adults," was published in *The Huffington Post* on January 30. The link is:
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-peter-breggin/electroshock-for-children_b_162606.html

3. Psychologist Bruce E. Levine's "Are We Really Okay with Electroshocking Toddlers?" was also published in the *Post* on the same day. The link is:
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bruce-e-levine/are-we-really-okay-with-e_b_162242.html

4. Neurologist Fred A. Baughman Jr.'s letter to the editor of the *Herald Sun* (Melbourne), dated January 27, has been posted to several listservs whose subscribers are critical of mainstream psychiatry. To my knowledge, the newspaper has not been published it.

To the Editor:

The medical profession--in this case Australia's--that does not rise up in outrage against the abomination of electroshocking children must view itself as morally bankrupt. Here being "mentally disturbed" in toddlers, like everything else in psychiatry, has become a diagnosis. Instead, this is a criminal act and needs being criminalized. It needs pointing out that the bioethicist quoted here, Prof Nicholas Tonti-Filippini has no ethics (where does his income come from?) and that Psychiatrist Paul Skerritt, of the Australian Medical Association who says ECT "rewires" a previously mis-wired brain should be advised that there is no such thing as "rewiring" the brain. The fact of the matter is that there is no physical treatment in psychiatry, all of their drugs included, that do not act on symptoms only, by causing diffuse physical damage to the brain.

After testifying to the Parliament of Western Australia in June, 2004 that ADHD was a fraud I wrote the Australian Medical Association and several other Australian medical specialty groups pointing out their obligation to speak out forthrightly (to me and, more importantly to the special committee on ADHD of the Western Australia Parliament) on the fraudulent representation of ADHD to be a disease (when, of course, it is not). The AMA (Australia's) responded assuring me they were to consider the issue after which they would write to me again. They never did. Their medical officialdom seems to have found making "patients" of normal children as much to their liking as does ours here in the US. That I do not dispute.

5. Dr. Baughman wrote an addendum to his letter to the editor on January 28.

To the Editor:

The electroshocking, electroconvulsing (we dare not use the words "therapy" or "treatment") of 4 year olds, or of children of any age, is a stain, more indelible all the time, on that nation's medical profession, government, and, upon the citizens themselves. I urge those who would leave it in place to go see it performed, even on an adult, or view films, especially of the persons status after the assault. You will come away convinced, as I am--a neurologist dedicated to protecting the brain--that electro-shock should be criminalized and totally banned.

6. Eleni Hale, "Child Shock Therapy," *Herald Sun* (Melbourne), January 25, 2009. The link is: <http://www.news.com.au/heraldsun/story/0,21985,24958938-2862,00.html>

Children younger than four who are considered mentall disturbed are being treated with controversial electric shock treatment.

Medicare figures show the use of Electroconvulsive Therapy has tripled in Victoria in the private health sector alone in six years.

A VicHealth report confirms more than 18,000 treatments were conducted in Victoria in 2007-2008.

Federal Government statistics show the use of ECT - an electric shock delivered straight to the brain - in the state's private health system increased from 1944 treatments in 2001-2002 to 6009 in 2007-2008.

About 12,000 treatments were performed in the public health system last financial year.

Medicare statistics record 203 ECT treatments on children younger than 14 - including 55 aged four and younger.

Two of the under-4s were in Victoria.

Last financial year, 6197 ECT treatments were given to Victorians against their will.

This news comes as the Western Australian Government moves to ban ECT procedures for children under 12.

The Victorian Government would not say if it would follow.

The figures have shocked some experts.

Prof Pat McGorry, chair of the National Youth Mental Health Foundation, said ECT treatment for children whose brains were still forming was worrying.

"That is of great concern, a very worrying trend and we need to know why," he said.

"Why has its use increased at that rate? I am shocked and amazed that children that young are being treated this way."

Though doctors are still mystified as to how it works, ECT is used to treat mental disorders such as manic depression and psychosis.

The figures show nearly three times as many women had shock treatment compared with men.

Side effects include memory loss, seizures and headaches.

Modern treatment involves anaesthetic before each ECT treatment, which occur at intervals during a few weeks.

Increasing numbers of patients who had been forced into ECT treatment were contacting the Mental Health Legal Centre claiming they were tortured, Vivienne Topp, a lawyer and policy adviser said.

Bioethicist Assoc Prof Nicholas Tonti-Filippini supported ECT on children, saying some toddlers were "disturbed".

Psychiatrist Dr Paul Skerritt, of the Australian Medical Association, said ECT sent the patient into an "epileptic" type fit, which helped rewire the brain.

"It is one of the most effective and safe treatments, though I would not be applauding its use in children. These figures are very high," he said.

7. Two readers' comments on Hale's article posted on the *Herald Sun*'s website. Others wishing to comment may do so by going to the link which provides an easy-to-use form: <http://www.news.com.au/heraldsun/story/0,21985,24958938-2862,00.html>

Medicare statistics record 203 ECT treatments on children younger than 14 - including 55 aged four and younger. Two of the under-4s were in Victoria. Bioethicist Assoc Prof Nicholas Tonti-Filippini supported ECT on children, saying some toddlers were

"disturbed"! My comment: This is appalling and it really shames our nation. Just totally disgusted. *Posted by: Natalie Mankinen of Finland*

The medicalization of society at large is rife, not only evidenced in this example of the use of Electroconvulsive Treatment but in a range of methods employed to socially control the behaviour of others. To subject children to the intrusion of ET and to exploit those whose responsibility it is to care for such children, namely their parents and usually their mothers, is tantamount to blatant social abuse of a far-reaching kind. An urgent public outcry is warranted. *Posted by: Gloria Hill of Canberra*

This posting was prepared by Leonard Roy Frank, January 31, 2009.