

EUROPEAN FORUM FOR ECT MEETS IN PARIS

The second meeting of EFFECT (European Forum for ECT) took place in Paris on September 18, 2006. Dr. Tom Bolwig, moderated and Dr. King Kho and Dr. Pascal Sienaert assisted with the arrangements.

In his opening remarks, Dr. Bolwig outlined the goals of the new society, also pointing out some of the difficulties faced by ECT in Europe today.

The scientific session commenced with the presentation by Dr. Max Fink, the keynote speaker, on "ECT Responsive Syndromes: melancholia, catatonia and mania". He systematically described the psychopathologic features of these syndromes and outlined the constellation of motor, mood and vegetative signs that define the optimal ECT candidate.

The next speaker, Dr. Declan McLoughlin, Senior Lecturer at the Maudsley in London, presented the results of two trials of TMS. The first (in press in the American Journal) was a multicenter trial in which 46 patients were randomized to either ECT or TMS. ECT proved significantly superior. The second trial, of outpatients receiving either TMS or sham TMS showed no significant differences.

The next speaker, Dr. Thomas Baghai, of Munich, presented results of two studies, one involving DEX/CRH testing in ECT patients, the other genotype of the ACE gene. The main findings were that patients with greatest hypercortisolemia and allelic expression of the ACE gene showed the fastest ECT response.

Next Maeve Mangaoang, a psychologist from Dublin, discussed the need for developing improved neuropsychological test batteries and suggested that cognitive retraining techniques (CRT) be adapted to the ECT paradigm. Although time did not allow for extensive presentation of the data she and her colleagues are collecting, her cogent and provocative talk was excellent.

The final speaker of the morning, Dr. Chris Freeman from Edinburgh, Scotland, gave a superb presentation about the effort to upgrade the standards of ECT services in the United Kingdom. He described both the Scottish Audit System and the Royal College's Accreditation System. He stressed the importance of the "team approach" to improving the quality of ECT care delivery. He provided excellent handouts, including web addresses for these ambitious, and successful, quality improvement projects.

The afternoon's scientific session began with Dr. Bjorn Wahlund from the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, discussing his group's efforts to use fMRI to study differences in brain function between depressed patients and normal controls. In a finger-tapping paradigm, he presented preliminary data showing differences in cortical and basal ganglia activation between the two groups.

Professor Athanasios Koukopoulos then gave an erudite presentation entitled "Antidepressant-induced Malignant Bipolar Course and ECT". Deriding the overuse of antidepressants championed by US psychiatrists as "delusional", he used both individual life-chart data and epidemiological studies to support his contention that antidepressants are responsible for the increase in mood cycling, rapid cycling and chronicity of mood episodes. He encouraged the use of ECT to interrupt these malignant patterns of illness. He also encouraged the audience to consider psychic agitation as important as motor agitation, stressed the need for aggressive early treatment of mania (ECT, lithium) and summarized with the aphorism "mania is the fire, depression is the ash".

The final speaker of the day was Gabor Gazdag from Hungary, who presented data from a survey of ECT utilization in that country. He discussed the distribution of diagnoses for which ECT is used in Hungary and plans for surveying ECT use in other eastern European countries.

Concluding remarks from Dr. Bolwig followed the business meeting. Dr. Koukopoulos thanked Dr. Bolwig for leading the proceedings with "a light touch". Indeed, the meeting was excellent and indicates that EFFECT is off to an auspicious start. Tentative plans are to continue to link the timing of the meeting to the ECNP, making the next one October 2007 in Vienna.

Submitted by Charles Kellner, MD