

Safeguarding Patient Rights in ECT: The Importance of Consent

What is ECT?

Electro-convulsive therapy (ECT) is an evidence-based treatment that can treat a variety of mental health disorders such as Depression, Bi-polar Affective disorder, Schizophrenia and Catatonia. The treatment involves passing a brief electrical current through the brain to induce a seizure. The seizure affects the parts of the brain which control sleep, appetite mood and thinking. This treatment is given under general anaesthetic alongside a muscle relaxant which is administered by an anaesthetist and anaesthetic nurse

Background

In 1996 the Scottish ECT Accreditation Network (SEAN) was established to create a safe, standardised process to deliver ECT treatments.

In 2023, SEAN reviewed each of the Standards and considered whether each was;

"effective for promoting improvement"
"still required"
"should be stood down"
"should introduce new standards"



Standard 7 of the new standards now states;
"All patients will receive a clinical review completed as a minimum after every two treatments covering all the elements listed:

- Recording of their legal status (MHA/AWIA and consent status)
- Assessment of clinical response
- Assessment of cognition
- The opportunity to provide feedback on their patient experience"

Aim Statement

By December 2025, 80% of Electro-Convulsive Therapy (ECT) patients will receive a review of their legal and consent status after every second treatment in line with Standard 7 of the Scottish ECT Standards

Why is it important to review a patient's consent and legal status?

ECT is a serious medical intervention and due to its nature, it is important that either ongoing consent or the appropriate legal documentation is in place.

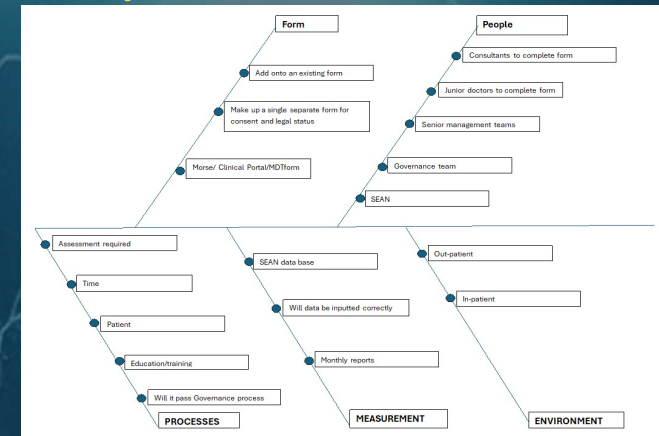
During a period of mental illness, a patient's capacity to consent and ability to make decisions may be impaired or fluctuate. Reviewing this regularly throughout treatment protects the patient's rights and dignity.

The law specifies certain instances whereby ECT can be delivered to a patient who lacks capacity to consent to the treatment. Reviewing this throughout the treatment process ensures that the treatment is being given lawfully and in line with legislation and compliance with the Mental Health Act. In short, reviewing the patient's legal and consent status after every second treatment will ensure that the ECT process is safe, ethical, legal and in the best interests of the patient.

Methodology

1. Designed a driver diagram to help identify some of the areas where change could be implemented.
2. Brainstorming with the ECT core team to get their feedback and opinions on the area of change that I would like to implement
3. Created a RACI Matrix to show who would be accountable and responsible within each part of the area of change.
4. The fishbone diagram was helpful in putting into groups where the potential issues/ barriers may arise.

Fishbone Diagram



Next steps

The change that I would like to make is the amendment of a review form which is already in use. The current form is called a T5 review form and has to be completed prior to the patient receiving their next 2 treatment. This form currently looks at any side effects being experienced and if there is any change regarding the patient's presentation. My change would incorporate an area that would ask the medic completing the form to comment if the patient's consent and legal status had been reviewed by the Consultant responsible for care and if not, why not?

The current form has been sent to the hospital's education department for design. Once this has been completed, it will be sent to the ECT core group for comment and feedback. If they are happy for this to be used, I will ask the senior management team and Governance team to review and if all in agreement this form can then be put in the ECT folders for use.

References

Baird, S. (November 2022) *Consultation: Scottish Electroconvulsive Therapy Accreditation Network – new standards email*. Scottish National Audit Programme, Public Health Scotland.
Public Health Scotland. (2024) *Scottish Standards for Electroconvulsive Therapy (Version 1.1)*.