



**COVID-19 Pandemic Guidance Document**

# **ELECTROCONVULSIVE THERAPY AS AN ESSENTIAL PROCEDURE**

*Prepared by the APA Committee on the Psychiatric Dimensions of Disaster and COVID-19*

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## **ELECTROCONVULSIVE THERAPY AS AN ESSENTIAL PROCEDURE**

**Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT) is an essential procedure in urgent clinical situations for psychiatric patients during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

Many hospitals and healthcare organizations have suspended elective procedures in an effort to minimize exposure by staff and patients during the current COVID-19 pandemic. ECT should be considered an essential procedure in urgent clinical situations and, if at all possible, be maintained as an available treatment procedure for psychiatric patients clinically assessed as high risk without it.

ECT is a rapid and highly effective treatment which is clinically indicated for highly treatment resistant individuals suffering from severe and incapacitating major depression, catatonia, mania, and psychosis related to schizophrenia. As such, ECT is not alone with regard to being utilized as both a routine clinical intervention for treatment resistant illness and as an urgent intervention for individuals who are high risk. There are many such examples in medicine and surgery, such as elective cholecystectomy for an individual with chronic pain due to gall bladder disease vs. urgent surgery for an individual deemed at high risk for rupture.

During the current COVID-19 pandemic, where there is a need to temporarily avoid non-urgent procedures and surgery, it is understandable that ECT be limited except in situations delineated above where the use of this modality meets criteria defined as urgent. Not allowing this urgent use of this rapidly and powerfully effective treatment modality will lead to harm to the patient over the short term, as well as increased ED visits and hospitalization at a time where such scarce resources are needed for other purposes.

### **REFERENCES**

American Psychiatric Association. *The Practice of Electroconvulsive Therapy: Recommendations for Treatment, Training, and Privileging*, APA. Washington, DC, 2001.

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