

Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri

NATIONAL BIOETHICS COMMITTEE

OPINION ON THE ETHICALITY OF ELECTROCONVULSIVE THERAPY

(22nd September 1995)

abstract

The opinion was raised by a request for the precautionary suspension of the use of electroconvulsive therapy and concerns only the bioethical aspects of such practice, without going into the strictly technical-scientific aspects.

The Committee declares that, having carefully examined the scientific literature on the subject, bioethical reasons do not exist to doubt the lawfulness of electroconvulsive therapy. However, the document expresses an invitation to use this type of therapy with great care, taking into consideration the medical guidelines and valid alternatives case by case.

It is recommended that in the hospitals and clinics where electroconvulsive therapy is used, the Local Ethical Committee investigate and evaluate the procedures adopted. Even though underlining the difficulties concerning the obtaining of the informed consent of psychiatric patients and of those representing them, the opinion urges medical staff to do the utmost to get consent, even by means of appropriate psychological support given to the patient and family.