



Montreal, 28 February 2005

Campaign for the Abolition of Electroshock

Hello,

Action Autonomie, the Montreal mental health rights collective, is seeking your support in a campaign for the abolition of electroshock. The use of this violent and demeaning procedure -- also known as “electroconvulsive therapy” or ECT -- is presently on a new upsurge in Quebec (and elsewhere). It offers no beneficial effects that cannot be obtained through other means and has serious repercussions on the physical and mental health of those who have been subjected to it.

We invite you to voice your opposition to this blatant disregard for the respect of the integrity of the most vulnerable persons, in the following ways:

1. By endorsing the campaign as a group and encouraging your members to sign the petition enclosed here;
2. By inserting your group’s logo at the bottom of the declaration “Human Beings are not Experimental Subjects!” (enclosed here) and returning it, along with signed petitions, to Action Autonomie;
3. By sending off your endorsement during the fax campaign that we are currently in the process of organising (we will notify you of the exact date);
4. By joining the coalition for the abolition of electroshock, on an individual basis or as a group.

Regardless of your choice of action, please inform us of your support *as soon as possible*.

If you need further information in order to make a decision, or would like to obtain a copy of the scientific arguments underlying our position (*presently available in French only*), Action Autonomie’s “Pare-chocs” Committee is prepared to meet with you (for an informal discussion, a presentation or a workshop... depending on your needs). You can contact us by telephone at (514) 495-3620 or, by e-mail at : d.m.blais@b2b2c.ca

We thank you in advance for offering your support and getting involved on any level.

In Solidarity,

Denise M. Blais
for Action Autonomie

Human Beings Are Not Experimental Subjects!

Why Electroshock Should Be Abolished

→ A procedure where the guinea-pigs are human :

Despite more than 70 years of practice, electroshock is still an experimental procedure; there are very few rigorous scientific studies; this procedure is administered for a wide range of mental health problems despite the official recommendations (Quebec Council for the Evaluation of Health Technologies); studies comparing the effectiveness of this procedure and that of different psychotherapeutic treatments have never been undertaken; patients rarely receive follow-up beyond a period of 6 months (most often it lasts 6 weeks); the importance of electroshock's harmful effects is not evaluated.

→ A frightening procedure

During electroshock, electrical charges capable of lighting up a lamp pass through the brain; patients most often receive 3 sessions per week (and more than 30 sessions during the initial period) ranging from 140 to 460 volts and with an electrical energy of more than 70 joules... just like in the days when this procedure was called “annihilation therapy” or “regressif treatment”; in order to determine the quantity of electricity required to induce a cerebral convulsion, repeated testing must be done on the patient, and this, at each new session; in an attempt to minimise previous risks and contra-indications, the more recent “modified” procedures introduce new ones; the unilateral procedure requires more voltage in order to obtain a cerebral convulsion; the brief pulse (or square-wave) procedure does not reduce the quantity of electrical energy that passes through the brain.

→ A very questionable effectiveness :

The effectiveness of a treatment must be measured in relation to the benefits obtained... however, when scientists speak about the efficacy of this procedure their focus is limited solely to the decrease of certain symptoms and does not take into account harmful effects; this so-called effectiveness has only been shown in cases of people suffering from major depression where, for a period of 4 to 6 weeks, it varies between 8 and 65% depending on the quantity of electrical energy used, with harmful effects increasing correspondingly; this rate of “effectiveness” is almost identical to that of placebos; this procedure does not prevent suicides.

→ A demeaning procedure:

Immediately after an administration of electroshock, people find themselves in a state of extreme confusion that can last for a week; they can feel either apathetic or, the opposite, euphoric; some lose their speech, others the control of their bladder, etc.; the psychological traumatism is comparable to that experienced following a rape.

→ **Serious repercussions on health:**

Numerous high-risk contra-indications have been identified; the effects of the administration of electroshock on the cardio-vascular and respiratory systems are so grave that deaths occur; the importance of lasting or permanent loss in memory of past events (retrograde memory) has been recognised; loss of the capacity for memory retention (anterograde memory) and changes in other cognitive functions (concentration, judgement, etc.) have been recognised; there exists a tightly-debated controversy within the scientific community surrounding the permanent destruction of brain structures; despite the polemic regarding their cause, the number of deaths is significant.

→ **Another form of violence against women:**

Twice as many women as men receive electroshock; women 60 years of age and older are the most over-represented group.

→ **There exist many proven alternatives to electroshock** that are not only safe and effective but also improve the quality of life and functionality of people.

→ **A procedure where free and informed consent becomes irrelevant:**

A person's right to be informed of the risks involved and to decide whether or not to accept a treatment is a fundamental and undeniable right. **But a treatment having harmful effects on health should never be proposed unless it offers indisputable benefits that are greater than its harmfulness and only if no other less noxious treatment exists.** However, as demonstrated above, electroshock does not meet any of these conditions.

**For all these reasons, we demand that the Ministry of Health and Social Services
declare an immediate ban
on the administration of electroshock!**

---> **insert your logo here**

PETITION

FOR THE ABOLITION OF ELECTROSHOCK

In Quebec, electroshock has risen from 4,000 sessions (in 1988) to 8,199 (in 2003).

**This violent and degrading procedure has no grounds for being administered,
considering that:**

- Despite 70 years of practice, electroshock is still an experimental procedure;
- Among the people who undergo electroshock, 2/3 are women and women 60 years of age and older are the most over-represented group;
- Electroshock constitutes an abusive psychiatric practice given its indiscriminate use for a wide range of mental health problems;
- The so-called effectiveness of this procedure, which scientists talk about, only concerns the decrease of symptoms and does not take into account harmful effects;
- This procedure shows no effectiveness in the prevention of suicide;
- Numerous contra-indications to the use of this procedure have been identified;
- Its effects on the body's cardio-vascular, respiratory, bone, and nervous systems are dramatic;
- Lasting memory loss and changes to other cognitive functions have been recognised;
- There is a tightly-debated controversy within the scientific community surrounding the permanent destruction of cerebral structures as well as the effectiveness of the administration of electroshock itself;
- Many people who have been subjected to this procedure compare it to rape;
- The administration of electroshock has resulted in deaths;
- This procedure does not improve, but rather, it destroys the functionality and the quality of life of people to whom it has been administered;
- There exist effective and safe alternatives to electroshock.

**For all these reasons, we, the undersigned, hereby submit our demand that the
Quebec National Assembly permanently abolish this practice.**

<u>Name</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Signature</u>
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Please return this petition *before 22 April 2005* to :
Action Autonomie, 1260 Sainte-Catherine east, local 208, Montreal (Quebec) H2L 2H2.
Tel. : (514) 525-5060 Fa x : (514) 525-5580

Thank you !