CONTINUATION (C-ECT) AND MAINTENANCE (M-ECT) ELECTROCONVULSIVE THERAPY AS AN ALTERNATIVE TREATMENT TO PHARMACOTHERAPY: A REVIEW

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Introduction: ECT has demonstrated to be an effective and safe biological treatment that can be considered as an alternative to pharmacotherapy, especially for treating severe, resistant and recurrent, affective, psychotic and catatonic symptoms. C-ECT refers to the one that is started after acute treatment and lasts for a maximum period of 6 months with the objective of preventing relapse. M-ECT is the one that is started once C-ECT has ended with the aim of preventing recurrences. The aim of this study was to explore the evidence for using C-ECT and M-ECT as an alternative to pharmacotherapy.

Methods: We performed a search in MEDLINE, PubMed and Cochrane, from 1950 until the present to identify articles in which C-ECT and M-ECT were used as alternative treatments to pharmacotherapy.

Results: C-ECT and M-ECT have demonstrated to be an effective and safe alternative to pharmacotherapy in Unipolar Depression, Bipolar Disorder and Schizophrenia, especially in the prevention of relapse and recurrences. It reduces number and days of hospitalization. In combination with pharmacotherapy, it increases effectiveness of pharmacological treatment. It does not affect cognitive functioning.

Conclusions: C-ECT and M-ECT should be considered as an alternative to pharmacotherapy in the treatment of affective and psychotic, severe, resistant and recurrent symptoms. It is an effective and safe treatment, which prevents relapse and recurrences in severe mental illness, reducing hospitalization rates and health costs.