Memory effects of restricted environmental stimulation therapy (REST) and possible applications to ECT.

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Abstract

Restricted environmental stimulation (REST) has been shown to facilitate learning and memory in both human and animal experimental subjects. This paper reports early data from a test of the usefulness of REST in reducing post-ECT amnesia in depressive patients. Two such patients were placed in a quiet, dimly illuminated room for 2-4 hrs. after recovering from each ECT administration in a series of treatments; three others, following standard practice, were returned to their normal hospital rooms. Measures of memory (verbal, numerical, nonverbal, life event, and self-rating) were given prior to the first ECT treatment; after the first post-recovery session; after the last post-recovery session; and one week after the last ECT administration. The major difference found was that the REST group showed an improvement in self-rated memory functioning from the first to the last ECT administration that was 15 times as great as that reported by the control group. This finding is interesting because of the major role played by self-reported memory disturbances in the scientific, clinical, and popular evaluation of ECT. The sample size is being increased, as it must be for any reliable conclusions to be drawn from this study.

PMID: 3628826

[PubMed - indexed for MEDLINE]

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