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Coalition challenges shock therapy use

By Jihae Min

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Despite the alleged harms of electroconvulsive therapy, psychiatric hospitals continue to use the procedure, according to the Coalition for the Abolition of Electroshock in Texas, which organized a rally Wednesday in front of Seton Shoal Creek Hospital.

Since its introduction in 1938, more than 6 million Americans have undergone electroshock procedure, according to the coalition. The Texas Department of State Health Services has reported the procedure was performed on 1,656 people in the state, including 163 people in Seton Shoal Creek Hospital, during fiscal year 2004.

Around 60 people participated in this campaign against the procedure because they feel the procedure is inhumane and has negative side effects such as memory loss, brain damage and even death, said John Breeding, psychologist and member of the coalition. During the electroshock, an average of 150-200 volts of electricity are sent to the brain every half to two seconds, Breeding said.

"We don't consider that a treatment," Breeding said. "We consider that torture."



Media Credit: Jennifer Soto | Daily Texan Staff

Betty Carlton condemns the use of electric shock therapy at Seton Shoal Creek Hospital along 38th Street Wednesday afternoon.

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Seton Shoal Creek continues to offer the treatment because it has proven to be effective, but even then, it is only used after other treatments have failed, officials said.

The purpose of electroconvulsive therapy is to help people overcome mental disorder, and it has been shown to have a higher rate of success for severe depression, compared with other treatments, said Mary Ann Dale, ECT coordinator at Seton Shoal Creek and one-time recipient of the treatment.

"Electroshock is an effective treatment and helps people," Dale said. "It saved my life."

Under law, other forms of treatments including talk therapy and medication are used first to cure depression. After at least three different kinds of drugs are proven to be ineffective, patients can undergo electroshock therapy, Dale said.

"I haven't seen any damage from it," Dale said. "There is no brain damage. I have worked in that department for 11 years."

During the rally, protesters stood with picket signs reading "Stop Electroshock" and "Shame on Seton" along Guadalupe Street, following public speeches and performance pieces.

"They have no reason to do that except making money out of it, because all that it does is to cause permanent brain injury," said Ellen Heath, a member of Bio-Psychiatric Survivors, Family and Friends. "Anybody that has done scientific research knows that."

The effects of electroshock therapy are dramatic, and Seton had three recorded deaths there in 1990, Breeding said. A wellness center, with more exercise and talk-therapy options would be a preferred method, he said.

"It's banned for children now in Texas, but it's still going on for adults," Breeding said. "I just hope Seton Creek does the right thing and takes care of people in a better way."

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Media Credit: Jennifer Soto | Daily Texan Staff

Protesters march next to Seton Shoal Creek Hospital at Shoal Creek Boulevard and 38th Street decrying the use of electroconvulsive therapy at the Austin hospital Wednesday.



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