

COALITION FOR THE ABOLITION OF ELECTROSHOCK IN TEXAS
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March 6, 2006

Sister Helen Brewer
Chair, Seton Board of Trustees
3501 Mills Avenue
Austin, TX 78731

Dear Sister Brewer,

Thank you for your letter of February 28, 2006. I am glad that Dr. Whitelock is reconsidering the use of electroshock at Seton Shoal Creek Hospital and I look forward to continued dialogue with him.

I am sorry that you do not want to meet with us just now because "the Board's role is governance, and not the management of operations." It seems to me that the use of electroshock is very much a governance issue having to do with ethics and standards of practice and community care that the Board needs to seriously examine. As you know from our initial letters to you, we see the administration of electroshock as an egregious violation of Seton's mission statement. I will now explain why our organization believes electroshock violates the spirit and the declared purposes of the mission statement.

"Our mission inspires us to care for and improve the health of those we serve with a special concern for the sick and the poor."

Electroshock always damages the brain causing memory loss and learning disability. The evidence is strong that the apparent benefits of electroshock (such as a reduction in depressive symptoms) are short-lasting and, according to many electroshock psychiatrists, must be reinforced by periodic outpatient electroshocks sometimes called "maintenance ECT." We think that the short-term duration of the benefit is actually a sign of failed treatment. The real concern is that with every additional electroshock its harmful effects accumulate.

It is imperative for you to understand that electroshock is an affront to your intention of serving "with a special concern for the sick and the poor." It is just this segment of the community that is most vulnerable to electroshock's devastating effects. Many shock survivors are faced with a life less abundant as a direct result of electroshock. This often means being to some degree permanently dysfunctional intellectually and emotionally and permanently dependent on others or the state for their economic survival.

"We are called to be a sign of God's unconditional love for all and believe that all persons by their creation are endowed with dignity. We serve each person as a Christian would serve Christ himself."

Just the thought of administering electroshock to the Christ is terribly upsetting. Many individuals experience electroshock as punishment, even torture. I am reminded of the

verse in Matthew (25:40), in which Christ said, “Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.” (Revised Standard Version, 25:40).

“As a caring community, we respect the dignity and needs of one another.”

The experience of community is crucial in life, particularly in mental health care. Psychiatrists justify electroshock as a treatment for depression. This is tragically ironic as depression is usually about grief and loss, suppressed emotional expression and failed community. Seton Shoal Creek can serve a great purpose by helping individuals begin to heal around these traumas, and offering them the experience of a deeply caring community as they look forward to returning to their homes and families. To electroshock them and send them back into the community even more hurt and befuddled than they had been before is just plain wrong.

In short, the use of electroshock should be of grievous concern to the Seton Board. As a religiously founded and focused institution, it should be doubly alarming. Ultimately, it is the Board that has the awesome responsibility for deciding to continue or discontinue the practice of electroshock at Seton.

We still want very much to meet with you to discuss these and other issues related to the use of electroshock. Please contact me anytime, by phone, mail, or email at john@wildestcolts.com. In the meantime, we will proceed with planning to draw public attention to the practice of electroshock at Seton Shoal Creek Hospital,

In all sincerity and good will,

John Breeding, PhD
Coalition for the Abolition of Electroshock in Texas.

Cc Texas Representative Elliott Naishtat
Texas Representative Eddie Rodriguez