

*A.I. Nelson:  
Electroconvulsive Therapy  
in Psychiatry, Addictive  
Medicine, and Neurology  
[In Russian]*

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Until recently, Russian psychiatry developed in isolation from the West due to the barriers of politics, language, economics, and culture. Alexander Nelson's book on ECT, in addition to its other merits, represents a break with the Russian tradition of isolation. This author is fully acquainted with the world literature on ECT and presents it to his Russian colleagues, many of whom still have difficulties with access to Western sources. He encourages his colleagues to study English and to learn how to use the Internet. To facilitate these efforts, he gives a list of useful Internet links and provides an English-Russian dictionary of ECT terms. The author is particularly attuned to the ECT developments in the United States and is familiar with the American leaders in the area. One of the introductory chapters gives biographical sketches of outstanding scientists in the ECT field; in addition to Meduna, Cerletti, and Bini, the Russian reader is treated to life stories of Max Fink, Richard Abrams, Conrad Schwartz, Harold Sackeim, Charles Kellner, Richard Weiner, and Sarah Lisanby. The book has a preface by Richard Abrams and it concludes with a detailed summary in English.

Apart from a manual of ECT published by the same author in 1995, this volume seems to be the first ECT Russian textbook. In view of the large number of psychiatrists and patients in

the Russian language domain, the publication is a landmark event.

The book's educational importance is supported by clear step-by-step descriptions of ECT practice. Staffing requirements, patient flow, ECT devices, and other equipment, anesthesia, oxygenation, muscle relaxation, stimulus properties, electrode placements, and other issues pertaining to ECT practice are described in detail. These descriptions are largely consistent with the contemporary ECT practice in the United States and Western Europe. Recent literature on transcranial magnetic stimulation, vagus nerve stimulation, and deep brain stimulation is reviewed.

There are some surprises for a Western reader. As suggested by the book's title, substance use disorders are one of the indications for ECT in Russia. ECT may alleviate opiate withdrawal syndrome; suggestive data are reviewed (pp. 119–120), but the references are limited to meeting abstracts and a PhD thesis. ECT is also used in the treatment of alcoholism. In general, the indications for ECT are somewhat broader than those adopted in the United States. Nelson states, "There is no psychiatric disorder in which one can be completely certain that ECT will not be useful—there is always a chance of success" (p. 103).

In Russia, ECT is sometimes combined with other treatments that would be unusual in the United States or Western Europe today. There is a detailed description of combination of ECT with insulin coma treatment (pp. 144–145); the most recent quoted report on this was published in 2004. ECT is also sometimes combined with extracorporeal "blood sorption" (p. 150); this is a "method of cleansing blood via passing through a vessel with a special granulated charcoal—technique that is well recognized in Russia for treating some mental diseases" (p. 362). Laser

blood irradiation is another treatment method sometimes used in combination with ECT in Russia. The efficacy of these unusual methods is not clear.

Nelson pays a lot of attention to ethical and legal issues. Official regulations issued by the Russian (or Soviet) equivalent of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services governing the rules of informed consent are quoted extensively. These regulations are compared with those currently in force in most European countries. This section provides a unique insight into the Russian legal system as it pertains to the administration of ECT and, more generally, to informed consent. Eight sample consent forms are provided for different situations (form for a competent patient, for relatives or guardians, for multiple ECT, for a single ECT as a part of maintenance treatment, etc).

Finally, Nelson proposes a plan for the future development of ECT in Russia. The plan includes the creation of a National Task Force on ECT, official guidelines for modern ECT, ECT centers of excellence for teaching, a certification system for physicians doing ECT, adequate state financing for the development of ECT, incentives for Russian production of a modern ECT devices, and a certification system for foreign-made devices before their introduction to the Russian market. Some parts of this very reasonable plan have already been implemented elsewhere, although it may seem to be rather ambitious given the current conditions in Russia. Alexander Nelson is the head of the regional Center of Psycho-Resuscitology in the Regional Psychiatric Hospital No. 23 in Moscow, as well as a senior lecturer in the Department of Psycho-Somatic Medicine of the Faculty of Postgraduate Education in the Russian University of Peoples' Friendship. He is a man of remarkable enthusiasm and energy, and I believe that he is likely to succeed in his endeavors.