

## My experience of ECT.

I became severely mentally unwell in early Jan 2017 soon after the death of my younger brother who died, in his forties, in the local hospice after 12 months of being very ill with a brain tumour. 2016 was a hideous year and the whole family, not least his wife and two early teens children, was very badly affected by degeneration of my brother from a fit and active athlete to a profoundly disabled man whose personality and character changed tremendously. For me, my brother's death came on top of losing my father when I was a young adult (he was 42), my mother in my early 40s (she was 61) and a close uncle in my mid 40s (he was 61) – all from different cancers and after periods of prolonged illness and consequential disabilities. I have a younger brother still with a very young family and my own family of my husband and 2 boys who are in their early 20s. Throughout 2016 & my brother's illness I carried on at work, looked after my own family, home and gave (willingly) a huge amount of time and support to my ill brother and his family. I was also supporting my other younger brother and his family.

Depression and anxiety hit me like a brick wall a few days after the funeral in January 2017. I had previously had mild post-natal depression after the birth of my first child and again after the death of my mum (I was on a very low dose of citalopram) but this was a totally different beast. Initially I tried to deal with it myself, sought counselling, GP advice etc. but it became apparent as time went on that my own efforts were not working. I began to lose sleep, not eat and I was in a constant state of severe agitation and anxiety. Basically, I was falling apart and was not functioning. I had been off work since mid-Dec helping care for my brother and my sick leave was extended as I had to have small operation on my thyroid in Feb. I'm unsure to this day how I actually got through the operation and recovery except to say that from my memories I was really struggling mentally and trying very hard to keep myself together doing normal things. In March I tried to go back to work but only it lasted 3 days.....the lack of sleep, lack of food, agitation and depression overwhelmed me. I was signed off by my GP with a 'severe depressive episode'. I had literally no pleasure in anything. I couldn't watch TV, read, enjoy any of the things that used to give me pleasure.

Much of my illness is a blank and large tracts of time I seem to have blocked out (probably for the best). It was a surreal, altered reality – a frightening and devastating 'otherness' that isolated me from the people I loved and the life I had built for myself. I was suicidal at times and my husband had to take me to A&E on more than one occasion as I was a danger to myself. The Crisis Team began to visit regularly, and I was placed under the care of a Psychiatrist. My medication had changed to quetiapine, mirtazapine and sertraline (I don't know what doses then – my husband dealt with my meds). I suffered horrendous panic attacks that left me prone on my bed and terrified my family. I spent some time in hospital on a mental health ward (poss May or June - I'm not sure) – there was some thought that the sertraline had exacerbated my agitation & it was changed to venlafaxine. I had by then been diagnosed with severe-agitated depression. My husband had to leave his job to look after me and both him and my boys and members of my family at various points witnessed me being acutely unwell.

By August there was still little improvement and I'm not sure how or when but ECT began to be discussed. This was a frightening prospect and it took some convincing me but the two

members of the Crisis Team who I saw regularly, the Care-Co-ordinator at the Community MH Team and the Psychiatrist were very positive and encouraging. I was on 45mg of mirtazapine, 400 quetiapine and 225mg venlafaxine but I was going around in circles. I still wasn't sleeping/eating – I had lost a lot of weight and simply wasn't functioning on any normal level whatsoever. In late August I became an in -patient at the Priory Hospital in Darlington and started the treatment at the Hadrian Clinic in Newcastle. I started off having the treatment twice weekly, stepped down to once weekly and eventually in October and Nov fortnightly. I finished treatment on 18/11/17. I had 16 ECT treatments and I began to see a change after approx. 6 treatments. I only actually stayed in the hospital for 2 weeks and then re-located to home and was lucky to have my husband and some friends who gave me lifts through to Newcastle.

The first positive changes were I began to sleep and eat, started watching TV and slowly enjoying the very simple but fundamental pleasures of living – seeing my little nephews, walking my dogs, stroking my cats, enjoying being in my home, having a coffee with a friend, cooking a meal and enjoying eating it. As time went on the depression continued to lift and I began to pick up life pieces of my old 'life/self'. My husband I visited his family in Somerset & spent some overnights in our motorhome and I began to do more and more activities independently. My husband returned to work and life began to return to our normality. We had a lovely family Xmas with my two boys home and on the 2/2/18 I returned to work. I've been slowly building up my hours each week and my colleagues have been wonderfully supportive and welcoming. I'm slowly reducing the quetiapine and that seems to be going really well.

The ECT treatment has not had any long-term side- effects. The process is a little daunting – mainly because of the paraphernalia around having a general anaesthetic -but the staff at the Unit were so kind, caring, compassionate and did everything possible to make me feel calm and as relaxed as possible. The tea and toast afterwards was especially welcoming. Special mention must go to Dr Stuart Watson who made me & my husband smile with his dressing malfunctions - odd shoes one day and beltless trousers the next. ☺ Around the time of the ECT treatments my memory was affected – so I lost recollection of some of the activities I engaged in at that time. But it was no worse than the memory and loss of time when I was ill and only on medication and since I finished the treatment there has been no significant memory loss. It is not an exaggeration to say that ECT has worked miraculously for me and very quickly. Not only did I start to get well after only 5/6 sessions I am back at work (albeit on a phased return and no official teaching commitments as yet) in less than 3 months from the end of my treatment. I can't bear to think about where I (and my family) would be if the ECT treatment hadn't been offered to me. I know that ECT suffers from a stigma and I've received a variety of reactions to it, but the reality is it is painless/non-invasive and has minimum side- effects.

I am sorry I can't be here tonight but I hope my account of receiving ECT treatment at the Hadrian Unit gives you all an insight to the treatment and its efficacy. I wouldn't hesitate if necessary to have it again and I credit it for potentially saving my life.