

Nigel Gray

By email: [fyi-request-12827-83ab6f33@requests.fyi.org.nz](mailto:fyi-request-12827-83ab6f33@requests.fyi.org.nz)  
Ref: H202003219

Dear Mr Gray

### **Response to your request for official information**

Thank you for your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) on 12 May 2020 for:

*“Given that Electroconvulsive Treatment has been used as a method of torture historically in New Zealand, can you please inform me of the precise number of these devices in NZ hospitals in present time?”*

*Given that a senior psychiatrist, Dr Selwyn Leeks, thoroughly trained and qualified by NZ Govt standards, used one of these devices to torture the genitalia of young boys, and that use of this device has also been declared and categorized as a form of torture, on what evidence (not basis but evidence and testing) is it continued as “therapy” in New Zealand?”*

On 21 May 2020, the first part of your request was transferred to all district health boards (DHBs) under section 14 of the Act, as the requested information is more aligned with their functions. You can expect a response from each DHB in due course.

In response to the second part of your request, I can confirm that electric shock treatment (as distinct from electroconvulsive therapy or ECT) is not used in New Zealand hospitals or mental health facilities. The Ministry of Health (the Ministry) does not support this treatment and if it were found to be being used now, it would likely be subject to an investigation by the Ministry or the Health and Disability Commissioner, as its use would raise serious ethical and medical issues.

ECT has been used to treat severe mental health conditions for over 60 years. In the absence of other treatment options for serious mental illness it became a popular treatment for a wide range of conditions. However, the use of ECT reduced dramatically in the mid-1960’s with the availability of medication (antipsychotic and antidepressant drugs), and because of increasing concerns over misuse and long-term adverse effects, despite improvements being made in the original technique. ECT remains a controversial treatment and it is accepted that it has not always been used appropriately.

In New Zealand, ECT is only administered by professionally qualified and experienced teams of health professionals (comprising a psychiatrist, an anaesthetist, an ECT nurse, and a recovery nurse) in each DHB, and special provision is made for the compulsory treatment of

patients pursuant to New Zealand's Mental Health (Compulsory Treatment and Assessment) Act 1992. Information on ECT is available on the Ministry website and data on the use of ECT is published each year in the Director of Mental Health's Annual Reports:  
<https://health.govt.nz/about-ministry/corporate-publications/mental-health-annual-reports>.

An independent review was conducted in 2003 investigating the safety and efficacy of ECT in New Zealand. The review concluded that ECT continues to have a place as a treatment option available to New Zealanders and that banning its use would deprive seriously ill patients of a potentially effective treatment.

I trust this fulfils your request. Under section 28 of the Act, you have the right to ask the Ombudsman to review any decision made on your request.

Please note that this response, with your personal details removed, may be published on the Ministry website.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'RS', is positioned above the typed name of the sender.

Robyn Shearer  
**Deputy Director-General**  
**Mental Health and Addiction**