



Doctors of Deception

Linda Andre

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Mechanisms and standards exist to safeguard the health and welfare of the patient, but for electroconvulsive therapy (ECT)—used to treat depression and other mental illnesses—such approval methods have failed. Prescribed to thousands over the years, public relations as opposed to medical trials have paved the way for this popular yet dangerous and controversial treatment option.

Doctors of Deception is a revealing history of ECT (or shock therapy) in the United States, told here for the first time. Through the examination of court records, medical data, FDA reports, industry claims, her own experience as a patient of shock therapy, and the stories of others, Andre exposes tactics used by the industry to promote ECT as a responsible treatment when all the scientific evidence suggested otherwise.

As early as the 1940s, scientific literature began reporting incidences of human and animal brain damage resulting from ECT. Despite practitioner modifications, deleterious effects on memory and cognition persisted. Rather than discontinue use of ECT, the \$5-billion-per-year shock industry crafted a public relations campaign to improve ECT's image. During the 1970s and 1980s, psychiatry's PR efforts misled the government, the public, and the media into believing that ECT had made a comeback and was safe.

Andre carefully intertwines stories of ECT survivors and activists with legal, ethical, and scientific arguments to address issues of patient rights and psychiatric treatment. Echoing current debates about the use of psychopharmaceutical interventions shown to have debilitating side-effects, she candidly presents ECT as a problematic therapy demanding greater scrutiny, tighter control, and full disclosure about its long-term cognitive effects.

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