

## Steady decline in the use of Electro-convulsive Therapy

### Mental Health Commission publishes report on the use of ECT in 2010

**Thursday 23rd February 2012.** There has been a decline in the use of Electro-convulsive Therapy (ECT) from 2008 to 2010, according to a report published by the Mental Health Commission today.

Commenting on the publication of the report, Ms Patricia Gilheaney, Chief Executive at the MHC said, “Monitoring treatments such as ECT is of the utmost importance. The Commission already regulates the use of ECT through statutory Rules and a Code of Practice which aim to safeguard the rights of patients. This year’s report shows that the pattern of use of ECT in Ireland is in line with our neighbour Scotland. It is especially encouraging to see that there has been a reduction in the number of programmes of ECT administered to patients who did not consent to this procedure.”

A total of 347 programmes of ECT were reported to the Commission in 2010. This represents a 7% decrease on the number of ECT programmes administered to patients in approved centres during 2009 when 373 programmes were recorded. There has therefore been a decline in the use of ECT in each year since the Commission first published data on the use of this procedure in 2008 when 407 programmes were recorded.

The vast majority of patients (84.3%) who were administered ECT were diagnosed with a depressive illness which is consistent with international best practice.

Sixty-seven in-patient mental health services, known as approved centres, made data returns to the Mental Health Commission. The majority of approved centres (55.2%) did not administer ECT or refer patients to other approved centres for this procedure in 2010. Twenty-three approved centres (34.3%) indicated that they administered ECT to their patients in the approved centre and seven approved centres (10.4%) referred patients to other approved centres for the administration of ECT. St Patrick’s Hospital administered the largest number of ECT programmes of all approved centres. It accounted for one third of all ECT programmes reported to the Commission. It is important to note, however, that St Patrick’s Hospital is a national service. The Department of Psychiatry at Waterford Regional Hospital (12.1%) and St Brigid’s Hospital in Ballinasloe (6.6%) recorded the second and third highest number of ECT programmes.

As in previous years, the vast majority of programmes of ECT were administered to patients who fully consented to having this procedure. In 2010, 90% of ECT programmes were administered to voluntary patients who consented to this treatment.

The Mental Health Act 2001 provides that ECT can be administered to detained patients who are either unable or unwilling to consent to this treatment. For 35 programmes of ECT or 10% of all cases, ECT was administered to detained patients who did not consent. This represents a decrease in the percentage of programmes of ECT administered without consent that was reported in 2009 (11.8%) and in 2008 (12%).

The administration of ECT to a patient without consent must be authorised by two consultant psychiatrists. Additional data collected by the Commission indicates that in 67.5% of cases where it is proposed to administer ECT to a patient without consent, both consultant psychiatrists assessed the patient as being unable to consent i.e. he or she did not have the capacity to consent. In 12.5% of cases, both consultant psychiatrists indicated that the patient was unwilling to give consent i.e. he or she refused to consent.

“The Commission has long been of the view that it should no longer be possible to administer ECT to a patient who is unwilling to consent. We have recently reiterated our recommendation to the Department of Health to amend the Mental Health Act 2001 by removing the term ‘unwilling’ from the Act in order to ensure that ECT can only be given to those who freely consent to receiving such treatment,” Ms Gilheaney concluded.

## **ENDS**

Issued by Murray Consultants on behalf of The Mental Health Commission

### **For further information contact:**

<b>Murray Consultants</b>	01 4980300
Mark Brennock	087 2335923
Aoibheann O’Sullivan	087 6291453

### **NOTES TO EDITOR**

Electro-convulsive Therapy (ECT) is a medical procedure in which an electric current is passed briefly through the brain via electrodes applied to the scalp to induce generalised seizure activity. The person receiving treatment is placed under general anaesthetic and muscle relaxants are given to prevent body spasms. Its purpose is to treat specific types of major mental illnesses.

A “centre” means. An “approved centre” is a hospital or other in-patient facility for the care and treatment of persons suffering from mental illness or mental disorder that is registered pursuant to the Mental Health Act 2001. The Mental Health Commission establishes and maintains the register of approved centres pursuant to the 2001 Act.

The Commission has produced *Rules Governing the Use of Electro-convulsive Therapy (ECT)* and a *Code of Practice on the Use of Electro-convulsive Therapy (ECT) for Voluntary Patients*, which regulate the administration of ECT in approved centres.