



1st November 2024

Deputy Matt Shanahan, TD
Dáil Éireann
Leinster House
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

RE: PQ 44189/24

To ask the Minister for Health to report on any professional understanding that exists around the treatment options of 'multiple monitored ECT', the use of sodium amytal in such treatments, and any likely adverse events in such use; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Shanahan,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in relation to the above parliamentary question, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response. I have consulted with the National Clinical Advisor & Group Lead for Mental Health (NCAGL MH) and National Clinical Programme for Anaesthesia on your question and have been informed that the following outlines the position.

I have been advised that the choice of the conventional single dose of Electro-Convulsive Therapy (ECT), as opposed to multiple monitored doses of ECT, is a matter for the consultant psychiatrist administering ECT and does not fall under the remit of the consultant anaesthetist involved. Single or multiple doses of ECT in the same session make no significant difference to the administration of the anaesthetic concerned.

Sodium amytal is not a medicine that is routinely used in modern anaesthetic practice in the provision of anaesthesia for ECT or any other procedure. There are reports of sodium amytal having been used many decades ago (1950s) as a pre-medication prior to the induction of anaesthesia. This use of sodium amytal predated the introduction of benzodiazepines (e.g., diazepam, also known by the trade name 'Valium') for the purpose of pre-medication.

The choice of sodium amytal prior to or during ECT may be at the discretion of the consultant psychiatrist who has prescribed the ECT session and/or is administering a dose or doses of ECT, after discussion with the anaesthetist who is administering the anaesthetic for the ECT session. The use of sodium amytal for the treatment of psychiatric conditions is outside the scope of practice of Anaesthesia.

Sodium amytal is a barbiturate and is, therefore, a very potent sedative drug. Caution would be required if this medication were to be administered prior to, or during, anaesthesia which has been achieved by means of the use of conventional modern anaesthetic medications.

I trust this information is of assistance to you but should you have any further queries please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Anne Horgan
General Manager