

Survivors of Lethal Drug & Shock Deep Sleep Therapy Vindicated After 30 Years

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An Australian judge's condemnation of a dangerous psychiatric treatment linked to 48 deaths and once used in U.S. mind-control experiments, ignites new calls for a global ban on electroshock treatment.

by [CCHR International](#)

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A recent finding by an Australian federal judge has vindicated hundreds of patients subjected to potentially lethal Deep Sleep Treatment (DST) involving heavy psychotropic drugs and electroshock. Jan Eastgate, the international president of CCHR, said CCHR helped get the practice banned in New South Wales in 1983 following 48 deaths. The group also exposed its use in U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)-funded brutal experiments during the 50s and 60s, where patients were electroshocked while in a drug-induced coma.[\[1\]](#) But a judgement on November 25, 2020 has reignited calls for electroshock treatment (ECT) used in DST to also be banned.

The Australian findings were in relation to two former DST doctors, Dr. John Gill and deregistered psychiatrist, John Herron, who questioned the publication of a 2016 book, the author of which had re-hashed the findings of a NSW Royal Commission into DST in 1988-1990, and other reports, including coroner inquests. CCHR and a nurse, Rosa Nicholson, had played a pivotal role in obtaining the re-opening of coroner inquests

that linked DST to the deaths, and other actions leading to the \$15 million government inquiry that condemned DST. Two DST doctors waited nearly 30 years to challenge the Commission findings that relied upon testimony from patients, CCHR, nurses, and international experts that condemned DST. The experts also were critical of the way in which ECT was practiced at the now-closed for-profit Chelmsford psychiatric hospital. ([Read article on the case.](#))

In a multi-million-dollar court challenge, this year's findings were the opposite of what the doctors had anticipated.^[2] Judge Jayne Jagot of the Australian Federal Court NSW Registry reinforced the Royal Commission findings, stating the Commission's report "exposed atrocities and horrors at Chelmsford and the applicants' roles in perpetuating those atrocities and horrors on patients who, on any reasonable view, were the victims" of "gross negligence, unethical conduct and medical malpractice."

Further, "In my view, the very nature of DST was dehumanizing and traumatizing. Patients and their families were not informed about what was proposed. Patients were rendered effectively comatose for no good reason, for lengthy periods, making them defenseless, helpless, and incontinent. While sedated they were subjected to ECT without anesthetic, oxygen or muscle relaxants."

The case reflects problems that still exist with electroshock today, including in the U.S. As used in DST, Judge Jagot said: "Many patients were not told they would be given ECT, and if they had known, would never have allowed it." Eastgate, whose CCHR headquarters are in Los Angeles, said: "In the U.S. today, statistics on the number of patients forced to undergo ECT without consent or based on misleading, if not fraudulent, information are not maintained. Consumer fraud is notorious, because often patients are not informed ECT causes brain damage."

Judge Jagot also stated: "ECT was open to abuse and was routinely abused" at Chelmsford hospital. "This reinforces my conclusion that it is likely that no patient gave informed consent to DST because no patient would have knowingly consented to a procedure with such a serious risk of harm and death had they been informed (as they should have been) about available alternatives and that DST was an experimental and unproven procedure."

Eastgate and the former Chelmsford Hospital whistle-blower nurse, the late Rosa Nicholson, worked together for many years exposing DST and ECT in Australia. Judge Jagot's judgement reinforced the vindication Nicholson obtained in the Royal Commission. The nurse had photocopied records as evidence against DST, which CCHR turned over to the NSW Attorney General to act and which helped CCHR to get four coroner's inquests re-opened.[\[3\]](#) Eastgate and Nicholson met following a DST psychiatrist, Dr. Harry Bailey, was publicly exposed for his sexual affair with a patient, Sharon Hamilton, that he'd electroshocked and her subsequent suicide. The psychiatrist, himself, was put under DST following Hamilton's death and years later, in 1985, he, too, committed suicide.

When the DST case arose again this year after so many years, Eastgate wrote a [tribute to the nurse](#) to reinforce the facts about her work.

In 1980, Eastgate provided copies of Rosa's photocopied records to *60 Minutes*—described by them as a "sizable dossier on Chelmsford Hospital." *60 Minutes'* award-winning expose called "The Chelmsford Scream," also showed how "Politicians had been warned that things were dangerously out of control...The psychiatric profession closed ranks around their colleague [Bailey]." It had been known for years that something was gravely amiss at Chelmsford but *60 Minutes* could not find a psychiatrist to speak out individually about it on camera. In fact, CCHR provided its co-founder, the late Dr. Thomas Szasz, then a professor of psychiatry based in New

York, to comment.

Anthony McClellan, a director of the 60 Minutes programs on DST said words to the effect that “The 60 Minutes program would never have been aired if not for the documents provided by Ms Eastgate.” And, in turn, Nicholson, Eastgate said.

As Judge Jagot quoted, “Rosa Nicholson became the central figure in exposing the truth about the dozens of deaths caused by medical malpractice inside Chelmsford Hospital.” Further, her contribution “to the exposure of the iniquitous goings-on at Chelmsford was a worthwhile endeavour that has increased, not reduced, the total sum of human knowledge.”

In a united effort, patient survivors of DST, especially the late former actor, Barry Hart, their families, nurses, several journalists, legislators and CCHR, were instrumental in causing a legacy of patient rights, but which CCHR says are currently being undermined in Australia that has seen a nearly 50% increase in the use of ECT since 2010.

In the U.S., over 100,000 Americans every year are subjected to ECT, some aged 0-5, according to State information. The over \$3 billion a year industry prompted CCHR’s latest documentary, [Therapy or Torture? The Truth About Electroshock](#), which includes the story of DST.

The delivery of DST in NSW is a criminal offense under the NSW Mental Health Act, while in Western Australia, ECT is banned and carries a jail sentence and/or financial fine if administered to minors—all thanks to CCHR. In the U.S., CCHR and ECT survivors were also instrumental in obtaining a ban on ECT use on minors in four states. CCHR wants to see such a ban extend to all age groups globally.

An [online petition also supports a ban on ECT](#).

Judge Jagot said she had “formed strong impressions of Dr Gill and Mr Herron... They were unable to accept criticisms of their

treatment of their patients and patients generally in Chelmsford who were administered DST and ECT. They appeared powerfully motivated by a need to see themselves vindicated from the serious adverse findings made by the Royal Commission against them. Their entire approach to their conduct was self-justificatory and self-exculpatory [free of guilt].”

Eastgate added the recent decision also vindicated CCHR and the Church of Scientology that established it in 1969 to investigate and expose psychiatric violations of human rights. “The doctors tried to undermine the years of work it took to get inquests reopened, media coverage to raise awareness about the DST risks, the medical licensing board complaints Barry Hart and I filed against Herron and Bailey, the support given the Chelmsford Victims Action Group, and much more that culminated in the Royal Commission. These are documented events.”

As one article on the Chelmsford scandal summarized, “Its outcome was rightly not just condemnation of Bailey—but rather, an investigation into how mental health services should be regulated so as to prevent such individuals from so perniciously undermining the practitioner’s Hippocratic promise to ‘do no harm.’”[\[4\]](#)

CCHR International also encourages patients damaged by ECT or their families to report this to the group using its [online abuse report form](#).

References:

[\[1\]](#) “1950s–1960s: Dr. Ewen Cameron Destroyed Minds at Allan Memorial Hospital in Montreal,” AARP, 18 Jan. 2015, <https://ahrp.org/1950s-1960s-dr-ewen-cameron-destroyed-minds-at-allan-memorial-hospital-in-montreal/>; “Deep Sleep Treatment Death Nightmare Awakes 30 Years Later to Condemn Current Psychiatric Practices,” TruthAboutECT.org, updated 27 Nov. 2020,

<https://truthaboutect.org/deep-sleep-treatment-death-nightmare-awakes-30-years-later/>

[2] “‘Deep sleep therapy’ doctors lose multi-million-dollar fight to clear their names: Dr John Gill, a former GP and deregistered psychiatrist John Herron used defamation laws to try and ‘rewrite history,’” *Australian Doctor*, 26 Nov. 2020.

[3] John Adams inquest (26 Jan. 1978 and Jan. 1980); Sharon Hamilton (March/April 1979); Miriam Podio (1982); Audrey Francis (1986)

[4] <https://chelmsfordblog.wordpress.com/>