SUMMARY

Background

Electroconvulsive therapy is an effective and affordable treatment modality for a range of mental illnesses. In Nigeria, unlike other countries in the developed world, it is still used in many centres in its unmodified form. Research in Nigeria, has focused mainly on validating its benefits, objectifying side effects and countering myths. A careful literature search reveals that none has examined the effectiveness of this treatment from the patients’ point of view in this part of the world. This has necessitated this study.

Methods

A cross sectional survey of patients who had received electroconvulsive therapy between 6 to 12 months prior to the commencement of the study in August, 2008 was conducted. A questionnaire, modified from a previous work, was used in eliciting socio-demographic/clinical variables, perspectives of patients on the quality of ECT service delivery, willingness to receive ECT again if required, and perceived benefits of the procedure.

Results

Approximately two-thirds of the respondents who received ECT were being managed for either bipolar disorder (35.5%) or schizophrenia (33.3%). Twenty-seven percent suffered from severe depressive episodes. Most were females (60%), unemployed (60%) and had least a secondary education (60%).

Just over sixty-four percent of the patients reported that the procedure was not
stressful; while 53.3% felt that ECT had been helpful. Those who reported having side
effects were in the minority; their complaints being headaches (8.9%), muscle pain
(17.8%) and memory problems (30%). Of those who experienced memory problems, only
4% reported still having the side effect at the time of the study. Over 88% reported having
poor information prior to commencing treatment; this was also reflected in their
perspectives on the attitudes of staff on the wards and in the ECT room.

Respondents who believed ECT was stressful were more likely to be employed
($p<0.001$) and experienced muscle pains after ECT ($p<0.001$). Having had muscle pains
after ECT was significantly associated with perceiving ECT to be less beneficial ($p=0.05$).
Similarly, there was a significant relationship between higher educational status of the
respondent and perceived lack of benefit of ECT ($p=0.004$). Furthermore, respondents
who believed ECT to be stressful were less likely to report the procedure being beneficial
($p=0.004$)

**Conclusion**

Based on the findings from this study, it is recommended that staff attitudes need
improvement. Also, clear guidelines on the administration of ECT need to be set, to
improve the acceptance of this procedure.