

Book review: 'Doctors of Deception: What They Don't Want You to Know about Shock Treatment'

Linda Andre; Rutgers University Press; Price € 20.99; 2009; ISBN 978-0-8135-4441-0

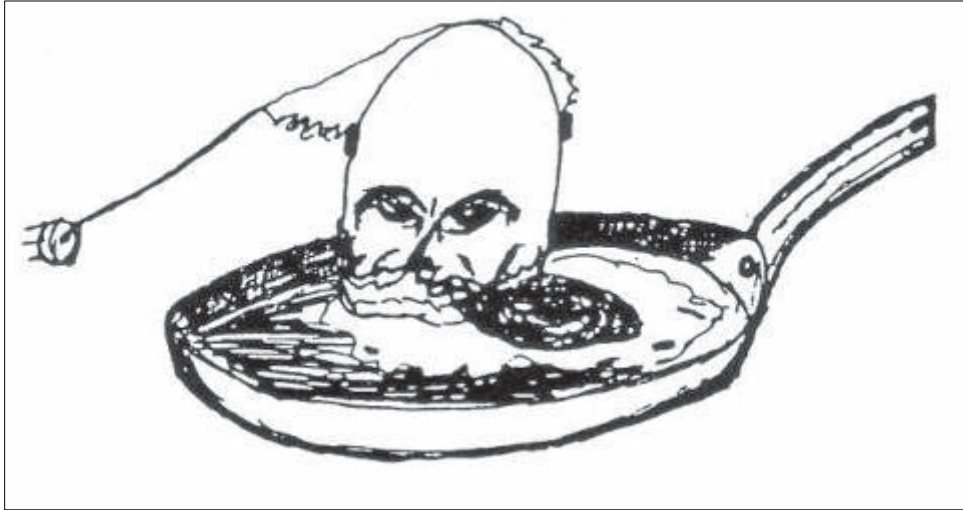


Image courtesy of Peter Lehmann's archive, Berlin

Linda Andre is an electroshock survivor who has spent the past 30 years recovering from her experiences with ECT. Her book is fascinating, essential and unique in many ways. Published more than three decades after Leonard Roy Frank's *The History of Shock Treatment*, it is the first book in the English language written by a shock survivor to include the voices and perspectives of survivors. It considers shock (also called electroconvulsive treatment, or ECT) from multiple perspectives: medical, scientific, legal, social, moral. It is thoroughly researched, painstakingly documented, and its overall level of scholarship—in particular its reliance on primary rather than secondary sources—is superior to that of any existing book by professionals (who are users and promoters of this practice seen by many as a form of legitimised abuse).

In focusing on the collective history of the ordinary people—mostly women—who have undergone electroshock, rather than the proclamations of the men who have made careers out of administering and promoting it, the book reframes traditional notions of what history is and who gets to make it. The author doesn't place herself outside of history as a supposedly objective observer, but tells us she writes from her firsthand experience as a maker of this history. The result is a book that is compelling in its immediacy and reads at times like a detective novel.

The reader is drawn to the conclusion reached by the author, which follows logically from the evidence of seven decades presented in her book: only a ban on shock can protect patients from serious and permanent brain damage.

This book should be required reading for judges, lawyers, relatives, patients and clinicians. Because of its readability, style, and even at times wit, it will interest general readers as well. It is particularly relevant for European readers since in 2004 the European Council accepted a recommendation that calls forced electroshock administration ethical' (see: "Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member states to ensure the

protection of the human rights and dignity of people suffering from mental disorder, especially those placed as involuntary patients"). The current scandal involving the continued use of forced shock in a society which defines itself as humane shows us how up-to-date Linda Andre's book is.

- Peter Lehmann