

SUCCESS

The mention of ECT, especially in lay people, sometimes invokes a vision of Jack Nicholson in “One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest”, quickly followed by a flashback of him in “The Shining”. Even though I knew it was now a lot safer and controlled, I was still sceptical and uneducated to its benefits. When I first moved to this area years ago I worked regular shifts in endoscopy, where they performed ECT lists twice per week. I was mistakenly of the opinion that this treatment was strictly for patients in mental health units. To my astonishment, many of these people would walk in off the street, get zapped, and then go about their daily business. What? Nutters in need of zapping were out there amongst us. Such caring and compassionate thoughts I had in my seemingly thoughtless head back then.

Anyway, there was this one little old lady who stuck in my mind and subsequently forced me to question what nursing really was and why I was in this profession. She helped me realise it was more than just a job, much more than mere funding for my nights out, shoes and holidays. I still clearly recall her face and name 15 years later and feel an unfading sense of happiness every time I think of her.

When I first met her she looked a little like a bag lady, no offence. Her hair was untidy and she looked and smelt slightly unclean. Her dress sense was one of nonchalance, usually long socks and slippers paired with a nice baggy floral dress sporting a broken zip. She didn’t talk and sadly appeared to be in a deep depression. I was worried that this lady was out there, on her own. To cut a long story short, I happened to be working every time she came in for 6 weeks. Each week I noticed a positive change in her. One week she had brushed her hair, the next she smelt like she had just gotten out of the shower and the next she had on some lipstick. At the 7 week point with her treatment finished, she paid us a visit loaded with chocolates, fruit and

thanks; immaculately dressed, beautiful makeup and hair, and with a cheerful bounce in her step and voice. I felt so happy for her it brought tears to my eyes; she asked me if I was alright. A feeling of deep satisfaction and joy washed over me, one that can't be achieved through individual or family triumphs. A sort of feeling that would be nice to have just before you die; nothing could have enriched it.

This experience opened my eyes to the gratification and happiness you can absorb through helping people improve their health and life. Seeing the appreciation in their eyes is the sort of thanks that inspires us to be better nurses and to think more about the purpose of nursing and why we are here. We're not here to climb the ladder or get as many qualifications as possible. We're here to care for others who need help or are having a bit of a hard time. We are here to provide every individual with the best care we can deliver in the most altruistic and respectful way; with compassion and empathy. We don't need chocolates, awards or even more money. Just knowing that we've provided the best care possible and helped someone in need should be thanks enough, and when you see a bonus improvement in their health and quality of life, that's what it's all about. That's what I call success.