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Hypnotherapy cycles back into acceptance

As healing evolves from a symptom-based therapy to a holistic approach, more credence is attained by the ancient craft of hypnosis.

By Pamela Coca/Vicus.com

VICUS.COM (14 April 2000) -- Everyone seems to experience an altered state of consciousness regularly. We may arrive at work without remembering the drive; we might watch a movie and become absorbed in the action; we may "zone out" during a dull meeting; or we might meditate to relax our mind and our body.

But this relaxed state occurring between wakefulness and sleep, when the mind is open to new ideas and learning, is part of the natural activity/relaxation rhythm of the body called ultradian rhythm (Brown, 1991). During this time, some are, in a sense, hypnotized.

Hypnosis has been considered a panacea and a conundrum in that it has been ridiculed and revered, praised and condemned. There is no magic or mystery surrounding the hypnotic trance. The trance merely centers attention in a way that facilitates access to the unconscious mind. This focus may be achieved independently or induced by someone else, such as a hypnotherapist.

Hypnotherapists are clinically trained hypnotists who use suggestion, re-education or analysis by hypnosis to assist people in reclaiming their physical and emotional health. Hypnosis is considered to be safe, painless and effective. Its myriad applications include post-traumatic stress disorder, memory loss, learning disorders,

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substance abuse, stress, anxiety, low self-esteem, eating disorders, phobias and to cure unwanted habits such as nail-biting and smoking.

Psychologists may use it to treat schizophrenia, multiple-personality disorder or bipolar illness. Dentists may use hypnosis for analgesia, anxiety reduction and to treat temporomandibular joint disorder. Hypnosis may even be used for pain control, anesthesia and stimulation of the overall healing process.

Hypnotherapists often use guided imagery, or creative visualization, to direct and focus the imagination. This technique may be familiar to many: "Your eyes are getting heavy, you are getting sleepy. Relax..."

The ancient Greeks and Egyptians practiced healing through hypnosis in their *temples of sleep* more than 3,500 years ago (Wolberg, 1948), but it was an estimated 50 years ago that the American Medical Association recognized the therapeutic use of hypnosis by physicians.

Acceptance of hypnosis, however has been slow, given its parallel public use as entertainment in comedy shops, on stages, and even on radio. Carol Watkins, M.D., who is board certified in child, adolescent and adult psychiatry and who advocates therapeutic hypnotherapy, tells consumers how to differentiate amateur hypnosis vs. medical hypnosis.

"Stage hypnosis depends on a certain amount of peer pressure and a given individual's conscious or unconscious wishes to perform. Frequently it is not done with consideration for the subject's needs or vulnerabilities. I see hypnosis as a specific medical or psychological procedure that should be done within the context of a therapeutic relationship," she said in a statement published by her Maryland firm, Northern County Psychiatric Associates.

There have been randomized control trials addressing hypnosis to aid in chronic, acute and cancer-related pain. Some research is evaluating chemical links in the body and determining how hypnosis affects different age groups. Pilot studies funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in 1999 included relaxation, hypnosis and guided imagery during invasive radiologic procedures.

"There has been consistent and strong evidence for more than a century that hypnosis can be very effective to alleviate acute and chronic pain. Such evidence has withstood rigorous scientific testing," said Etzel Cardeña, Ph.D., president elect of the American Psychological Association.

Cardeña explained that hypnosis is not for everyone, but it has no side effects and empowers the patient with self-control.

SELF-CONTROL.

An estimated 7,000 publications have been released since 1966 addressing psychotherapeutic intervention, in some 150 different general medicine, psychological and interdisciplinary journals (Nash, Minton, and Baldrige, 1988). 

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Pain management a possibility with hypnosis

Self-hypnotic relaxation techniques prior to surgery have been shown to be beneficial in the reduction of pain during the operation.

By Pamela Coca/Vicus.com

VICUS.COM (6 June 2000) -- Drugs may not be the only way to cut through pain in surgical patients.

"We use self-hypnosis techniques to make procedures more comfortable, safer and faster," said Elvira V. Lang, M.D., chief of Vascular and Interventional Radiology at Harvard Medical School.

Using self-hypnosis techniques on patients, Lang and her colleagues found that the patients used less pain medication, left the operating room sooner and maintained better vital signs during their operations. This study, published in the April 29 issue of the weekly journal *The Lancet*, suggests that self-hypnotic relaxation techniques can be beneficial in the reduction of pain during surgery.

The 241 patients studied underwent interventional radiology procedures to open clogged arteries and veins, relieve blockages in the kidney drainage system and block blood vessels that were feeding tumors. The patients for these minimally invasive surgeries were divided into three groups. The hypnosis group fared best by most measures, with only about 50% of the patients needing any medication for pain or anxiety, according to results.

Prior to the procedure, the patients were assisted with deep-breathing exercises and individualized guided imagery, which is a technique in which the mind conjures

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multisensory images that the body perceives as real.

The price of pain

Pain is typically treated with prescription drugs. Prescription drug spending in the United States is projected to rise 15% to 18% a year for the next five years, easily doubling to \$212 billion by 2004, which could translate into health insurance premium increases of 2% to 4%, according to the Health Insurance Association of America.

The study was funded by the National Institute of Mental Health and the Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, part of the National Institutes of Health.

Pain is a critical health problem in the United States. It is the most common reason for medical appointments -- nearly 40 million visits annually -- and results in an estimated \$100 billion each year in health-care costs and lost productivity,

according to the NIH.

It has a profound effect on the quality of human life. In addition to possible deleterious effects on immune function, pain can cause disruptions in sleep, eating, mobility and overall functional status. In the hospitalized patient, pain may be associated with increased length of stay, longer recovery time and poorer patient outcomes, all of which have health-care quality and cost implications, studies have indicated.

Marcia Greenleaf, Ph.D., and assistant professor at Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York City, said in a telephone interview that pain management through hypnosis is primarily used to give the patient control of their imagination and their emotions.

She explained that studies with professional athletes and dancers have shown that what you imagine provides a direct effect on the way your muscles and nerves react. Greenleaf suggested teaching the patient to hold in mind something that is an antidote to the painful sensation. For example: A patient with burning pain would imagine something cool or cold such as standing under a cool waterfall or making snow angels.

Fear and anxiety exacerbate painful sensations because they both create a lot of tension and therefore create more pain. Also, many times people are angry about their pain and anger makes pain worse. The physiology of pain, anger, fear and anxiety all increase adrenaline release, resulting in the constriction of blood vessels and make the body tenser.

Hypnosis teaches the patient to use controlled imagination techniques instead of fighting against the pain. Through hypnosis, patients focus

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their emotions in a beneficial way, for feeling better, for healing and for having what they want out of life (Greenleaf, *et al.*, 1992).

Guy H. Montgomery, assistant professor at The Rutenberg Cancer Center, at Mt. Sinai Medical Center in New York City, recently completed a randomized study on hypnosis as an aid to pain management in conjunction with excisional biopsies for breast cancer. Montgomery said in a telephone interview that the study had "very nice effects."

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He evaluated 20 patients; 10 received hypnosis prior to surgery and 10 did not. Everything else was the same for all of the patients. The hypnosis reduced patient stress and pain. A paper on the study is currently in process, Montgomery said in an interview with Vicus.com.

Montgomery, a firm believer in encouraging a patient to use his or her own abilities to change their perception of pain, said he has just received a grant from the National Cancer Institute (NCI) to pursue his study of hypnosis prior to lumpectomies. 📌

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