

Hypnosis opens door to healing

Prasanna Panditharatne- Psychologist

Hypnosis has proved effective in the treatment of pain, fear, depression, even irritable bowel syndrome, and is backed by sound scientific research.

Many are suspicious, believing that we forfeit our free will under hypnosis - a perception probably originating from the stage antics of showmen and their subjects.

Dr Amanda Barnier, of the University of NSW Hypnosis Research Laboratory, have told PBP CONSULTANCY in Melbourne this misconception could not be further from the truth. "Hypnosis is a skill of the individual, not the hypnotist," she says.

"In fact, many people view hypnosis as a natural state. Any one of us - while sitting on a bus, watching television or simply looking out a window - moves in and out a hypnotic trance several times a day."

Although hypnosis is endorsed by the medical profession, fewer than 7 per cent of GPs in Australia are trained.

In the 1950s there were five big hypnosis labs in the world - four in North America and the other at Sydney University, under the guidance of professors John Phillip Sutcliffe and Gordon Hammer. It was partly due to the interest they fostered that the research continues.

Dr Wendy-Louise Walker was a student at Sydney University during that period. She went on to teach hypnosis at the university delivers lectures for the Australian Hypnosis Society and has used hypnosis in psychological practice over the past 40 years.

"Hypnosis is variable, imaginative and very creative, but it is not a simple, single-treatment modality. We do not treat patients by hypnosis," she says.

"During hypnosis the practitioner works with certain characteristics of the altered state of consciousness - suggestibility, increased imagination and dissociation - to facilitate the learning of new skills or the integration of different views."

A patient is able to distinguish between different mental functions; in pain relief, for example, a patient can be helped to change the perception of pain and to decrease the sensation of it.

Studies have shown distinct physiological changes in the brain during hypnosis. Research by US psychologist Dr Helen Crawford has demonstrated that during analgesic hypnosis, the executive functions of the frontal lobe activate to work with other parts of the brain to inhibit the perception of pain.



Down but not out ... psychologist Prasanna Panditharatne, who uses hypnosis to help manage chronic pain, at work in his Endeavour Hills surgery.

Psychologist Prasanna Panditharatne has successfully used hypnosis to help manage chronic pain, especially pain associated with arthritis and diabetes. "Nerve damage causes stress, and hypnosis is very useful in overall stress management related to chronic areas of disease," he says.

It also helps to take the focus away from the problems that pain is causing, such as sleeplessness and frustration.

"Hypnosis gives people the skills to carry through what they have learned into everyday, waking life," says Prasanna.

Psychologist Prasanna has helped several patients apprehensive about the pain of childbirth. "I train them to put themselves in hypnosis and ask them to choose a certain piece of music. When the music comes on, my patient takes herself serenely into hypnosis - you rehearse this. If people speak to her, she can respond, but in this state she will register the sensation but not the pain."

He is also treating several Combat officers in the Armed forces those who suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. "I use music as a pathway to and through trance, with my words woven in with the repeated suggestion that, bit by bit, as they feel the glory of the music, the harmony, little bits of emotional debris from their traumas will begin floating away. The memory will stay clear, you don't want to lose that, but the emotional debris - the fear, the anger, the bitterness - will slowly float away over time."

Dr R.S. Muthukrishnan, a Sydney GP, differs from Prasanna and other researchers on one fundamental point. He believes hypnosis is inherently healing. "When people go into a trance state, healing power is enhanced," he says. "When you are watching your favourite movie you don't feel pain. You're in a kind of trance state when you enjoy something very deeply, and that's hypnosis."

Muthukrishnan, who has taught hypnosis to more than 250 GPs in Australia, says: "It belongs in general practice; that's where it originated. Researchers take the extreme; they work with highly hypnotizable people, and forget the value it has for everyone else."

About 10 to 15 per cent of the populations are seen as highly hypnotizable; the same percentages are not good subjects, and the rest are average. Psychologist Prasanna says: "It's a figure that parallels the circumstances for any treatment. Some people are more susceptible to particular drugs than others."

There are clinical measurements to gauge hypnotizability, but the best subjects tend to have good attention abilities and become easily absorbed in activities.

The Australian Society of Hypnosis runs regular courses for doctors, dentists and psychologists. A few years ago, Sydney GP Dr Monica Moore attended one and ended up introducing the technique into her practice. She sees the conscious mind as a computer screen that allows about eight windows to be open at one time.

"The subconscious mind is the computer hard drive that sometimes makes connections that are not helpful. Hypnosis is a tool for reworking those connections in the subconscious mind."

Moore stresses the need for combining behavioral modification with hypnosis: "Hypnosis induces a relaxed physical state, but unless you offer people those relaxed suggestions along with tasks they continue in the real world, they will go on in the same way they always have."

Regardless of differences in approach, practitioners do agree that hypnosis is a useful tool. It is not seen as dangerous, but the Australian Hypnotherapists' Association believes its use should be limited to people who have primary training in their basic area, such as dentists, doctors, psychologists and psychiatrists.

Note: This article intended to address the positive aspects of the Hypnotism. It is also expected to answer much reader's curiosity about this most advanced psychotherapeutic tool.

Visit www.pbpconsultancy.com or write to prabu1@pbpconsultancy.com