

Village News/Southwest News April 11, 2006

Hypnosis May Be Your Answer to Better Health

By Michael Schuman

Hypnosis—magic or miracle? Neither. For those who've seen the stage shows or the movie portrayals it seem like magic or perhaps a parlor trick. For those who've undergone a surgical procedure using hypnosis as the only anesthesia it may seem like a miracle. Since the late 1990's, with the advent of PET imaging, the conclusion has become more evident that there really are changes going on in the brain using hypnosis with suggestion so it really isn't a placebo effect.

Sora Song, writing "Mind over Medicine" in the March 27, 2006 issue of Time Magazine points to an article in the journal, Regional Anesthesia and Pain Medicine, where "Dr. Sebastian Schultz-Stunner of the University of Iowa reported using heat-producing thermodes to measure the pain thresholds of 12 healthy volunteers.... When the participants were hypnotized and re-exposed to the thermodes, all 12 reported feeling significantly reduced pain...or no pain at all." "...Schultz-Stubner hypnotizes patients to reduce pain and anxiety while they receive pre-surgical nerve blocks, such as epidurals. He finds that the calming effects of hypnosis often last through the entire operation" Hypnosis has been used during implantation of deep brain electrodes in Parkinson patients and in pediatric patients undergoing bladder catheterizations and many other procedures.

"The differences in the subjects brain scans were equally striking.... the primary sensor cortex stayed quiet. The 'ouch' message wasn't making it past the mid-brain and into consciousness." So as each day passes and each new experiment confirms those that came before, the evidence of a strong mind-body connection becomes ever more scientifically evident.

"The new findings," Song writes, "have fostered interest in the U.S., where doctors are using hypnosis for procedures in which sedation is inappropriate or for patients who are allergic to anesthetics."

Song reports that in Europe and the United Kingdom, where the surgical applications of hypnosis have flourished, Dr. Marie-Elisabeth Faymonville of the University Hospital of Liege in Belgium, who leads a team of doctors, developed a technique that replaces general anesthesia with hypnosis, local anesthesia and a mild sedative. Faymonville found that, "hypnotized patients can get by on less than 1% of the standard medications required for general anesthesia, thus avoiding such after-effects as nausea, fatigue, lack of coordination and cognitive impairment."

No one, certainly not I, nor even the most enthusiastic proponent of hypno-sedation suggest that it replace anesthesia entirely. But physicians and patients are becoming more open to its complementary use in appropriate circumstances by either a physician trained in its use or, by referral, by a Certified Hypnotist trained and certified in its use.

In 1958 hypnosis was sanctioned by the American Medical Association for use in medicine and dentistry. Since then, doctors and, by physician referral, Certified Hypnotists, have hypnotized patients to help ease such ills as migraines, depression, anxiety and chronic cancer pain.

Certified Hypnotists see clients with many other issues: habits such as smoking, weight control and fingernail biting are common. But we also see many issues where unwanted or unneeded stresses and fears contribute. We help people overcome their fears of public speaking or performance, taking tests, or making sales cold calls. And, by physician referral, we see clients with other medical issues such as Fibromyalgia, Irritable Bowel Syndrome, Chronic Pain, and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome.

No, hypnosis isn't magic, nor is it a miracle. But tell that to the 77 year-old client in the beginning stages of emphysema who came to my office, wheeling her oxygen bottle behind her, and smoking more than a pack of cigarettes a day. A week later she returned without her oxygen having quit smoking. There are many success stories that space doesn't permit. And because we don't do magic, there are failures as well. Usually, a consultation, either by phone or in person will allow the client and the hypnotist to know if his service is appropriate.

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