

Use of Hypnosis in Dentistry

Bodecker, Charles F., Borland, Loren R., Miller, Joseph S. A.,
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(A Condensation)

■ With the discovery of anesthesia, the interest in hypnosis almost ceased insofar as its use in surgery and general medicine was concerned. It has limited use in psychiatry as an adjunct to treatment, until the patient is capable of handling his difficulties through the usual psychotherapeutic means. Hypnosis is used to some small extent in surgery and obstetrics. Its use in dentistry is suggested for apprehensive patients. It may banish fear and make other anesthesia unnecessary.

The patient surrenders critical faculties rather than will power. Patients have terminated trances when the suggested situations become uncomfortable or threatening. Where the patient is motivated entirely by the will of the hypnotist, there is serious reason to re-examine the patient's real desires.

All hypnotizable patients are suggestible and therefore subjects for hypnosis. They are often so only in relation to certain hypnotists or persons resembling them. The subject ordinarily becomes more and more readily hypnotizable

depending on time, place, emotional state and previous experience, with repeated experiences. Post-hypnotic suggestions may be established in those who have reached a relatively deep state of trance. Post-hypnotic suggestions must be carefully thought out and equally carefully presented if unfortunate results are to be avoided.

A statement given to a subject under trance may be accepted unhesitatingly as being true. One of the theories of the psychodynamics of hypnosis evolves about the development of an increasingly uncritical attitude on the part of the subject. Thus the hypnotist begins with suggestions which are only partially untrue and slowly and skillfully leads the subject to the uncritical acceptance of more and more obviously unrealistic statements. Hypnotic hallucinations can be produced as well as sensory distortion or malfunction.

Hypnosis cannot reverse the acquired ability of a patient to reason, and a patient will not execute a command that goes counter to his deepest ethical convictions.

The question of altering habit patterns by post-hypnotic suggestion is part of the whole problem of motivation. Thus changing habits of brushing teeth or the regularity of dental visits cannot be reduced to a simple command.

Experimenters have reported numerous experimental situations in which obviously antisocial behavior was produced in a hypnotic state. In skilled and ethical hands hypnosis is as powerful and salutary an instrument as its recent applications in hypno-analysis indicate, but in unethical hands, it might become a dangerous instrument. Hypnosis must be thought of as a two-edged tool to be used with caution only by those who possess both an understanding of the motivations it releases and the desire to use them for scientific and therapeutic purposes.

Mental complexes may develop in a patient in trance as a result of random statements. The mentally ill patient constantly has to cope with feelings of unreality and de-personalization, with aggressive and self-destructive desires. Such states may be aggravated by hypnotic suggestions. Hypno-analysis is equivalent to a surgical removal of barriers and hazards.

Excursions into the patient's past or exercises in unreality are especially fraught with danger. It is hardly within the aegis of the den-

tal hypnotist to predict what may be uncovered thereby or if the patient will be able to cope with the material uncovered.

It is always inadvisable to use hypnosis unless the hypnotist has a broad and detailed understanding of psychodynamics as well as clinical training in the handling of emotionally disturbed patients. Even with these qualifications, it is inadvisable to use hypnosis with certain types of patients. The hypnotist should have a sufficient understanding of the particular subject to feel relatively certain that his ego defenses are strong enough to make hypnosis safe.

The emotional state regarding a dental condition is part of the total personality, behavior and emotional pattern of a dental patient. Hypnosis is not merely a sedative or preparatory part of the practice of medicine, surgery or dentistry. It deals with a patient in a very suggestible state of mind, and one in whom dormant anxieties and conflicts can easily be stirred to untoward and unpredictable results including severe neurotic or even psychotic behavior. The precise effects of hypnosis on the psyche of the subject is not known, and there is widespread disagreement among the leading authorities in the field as to the actual psychodynamic explanation of the hypnotic phenomenon itself.

Three rules to observe are: 1) Never hypnotize a patient without his formal consent. 2) Never induce sleep except in the presence of a third party. 3) Never give a patient any other suggestions than those necessary for his care.

The authors state that less than one per cent of patients in dental

practice might be treated more suitably by hypnosis than by accepted anesthetic technics. They all agreed that they would not permit members of their own families to be hypnotized by anyone not having accepted training in psychology and psychiatry.

SIDNEY EPSTEIN.

Tufts to Give Postgraduate Refresher Course in Local Anesthesia by Leonard M. Monheim in February

■ The Tufts University School of Dental Medicine (136 Harrison Avenue, Boston, Massachusetts) announces a Postgraduate Refresher Course in Local Anesthesia, to be given by Leonard M. Monheim, Professor of Anesthesia, University of Pittsburgh School of Dentistry.

The course will be given on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, February 9, 10 and 11, 1959. Tuition is \$75 and the class is limited to 15 students.

Dr. Monheim will present a thorough discussion of the physioanatomy and neuroanatomy of pain processes, along with methods of controlling pain, the most important of which is regional analgesia (local anesthesia). All the more recent innovations and technics of regional analgesia, including pharmacology and toxicology of the agents used, will be discussed. Untoward reactions will be covered in detail, stressing the symptoms and methods of prevention and treatment.

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