

Hypnodontics: Role of hypnosis in oral health

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Abstract

The main problem encountered during routine dental treatment is anxiety and fear called dental phobia. Even a medical treatment of the oral region under local anaesthesia is causing intense anxiety. Such attitude of some patients to dental procedures is a cause of their irregular visits in dental clinics, which, in consequence, may lead to increase more severe forms of dental diseases and also poor efficiency of dentists. Clinical hypnosis could be a non-invasive therapeutic option to increase treatment comfort both for the patients and dentists. This paper has been written to explore the uses of hypnosis in dental practice.

Keywords: Hypnosis, Hypnodontics, Dental phobia.

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INTRODUCTION

Hypnotic dentistry or Hypnodontics defined as the art and science of using hypnosis to induce comfortable and painfree dental visits. Hypnosis is used to reduce stress caused by anxiety and fear or dental phobia and induce anesthesia so that less medication is used. Hard to manage or on co-operative patients and pediatrics often present the majority of problems the dentist encounters in their daily routine. They take extra time and require special consideration by the dentist and the assisting staff. There are multiple reasons why such patients are fearful, tense, nervous and anxious before, during, and even after the dental visit. These patients will complain of extreme anxiety prior to a simple check-up and repeatedly request

tranquilizers to help them cope up with the stress. Hypnosis can easily alleviate the tension, nervousness and unreasonable fear of pain often exhibited by these patients. The hypnoterapist should meet with this type of dental patient two or three days prior to the scheduled dental appointment. Hypnosis may be used either independently or as an additional option with other forms of treatment for best results.¹

MATERIAL AND METHODS

A trance induced by hypnosis carries a physiological, inwardly focused state which is measured by alpha brainwave activity and is associated with deep mental and physical relaxation. A trance is an absolute natural phenomenon, used since ages by many cultures throughout the world. It has been used for self healing or for healing others. Induction of hypnosis depends primarily on how the hypnotist induces a trance, and on the patient's willingness and capability to relax and fall into a trance. The hypnotist necessitates to create a communicative framework that allows the patient to accept a trance. This is achieved by clarifying myths surrounding hypnosis, the patient's expectations of how hypnosis functions, and the patient's trust in the competency and professionalism of the hypnotist.² Hypnosis applies a unique form of communication to help

the patient relax physically and mentally as he/she lies on the dental chair. The patient's eyes are closed, muscles are relaxed, and the mouth is literally handed over for repairs. During this time, the patient's mind is occupied with the thoughts he likes most like beautiful vacation or other wonderful and relaxing experience, but at the same time the patient reacts when addressed and retains all natural reflexes. Contrary to myths, the patient does not simply disappear into some state of Nirvana, but is rather disassociated as it discerns the treatment through a kind of fog from an agreeable distance. Afterwards, these patients recall their perception of the dental therapy with remarks like, "Well, I certainly knew that you were working on my teeth, but it was not very important, because it just seemed so far away somehow." Another pleasant side effect of treatment under hypnosis is the time distortion caused by the trance. A hypnotized patient's subjective perception of time is much shorter than reality. For example, patients often respond that a session, which really required a whole two hours, lasted a mere 45 minutes.^{2,3,4}

KEY INDICATIONS IN DENTISTRY

Dental Analgesia

Hypnotic methods use in dental practice for analgesia presents several benefits over chemical anesthesia. It is not associated with chemical numbness, which gives discomfort to the patient for several hours after the procedure and is responsible for slurring of patients speech or inadvertently biting their inner cheek which further give discomfort to patients and it also avoids anxious sight of needle. Extractions, root canal procedures, deep filling, and periodontal work can all be made to be more pleasurable, acceptable, effective and less time consuming by attempting a simple induction and giving suggestions for numbness and relaxation. In the dental setting, numbness of the index finger can first be produced; the patient's hand is then guided into his mouth to touch the gums and teeth or the dentist, while the patient is in a trance, touches the area of the jaw, first externally then internally with paired suggestions for relaxation and numbness.^{5,6}

Gagging

The most common troublesome problem that a patient may bring to the dentist is that of gagging as soon as anything is inserted into the mouth. Ggreflec can be completely and comfortably eliminated by Waking hypnosis. There are two main techniques that are used, both being equally effective. The first procedure involves the use of a pen or pencil which the therapist or dentist must place in the patient's hand. The therapist must state with authority, "I am now going to place this pencil in your hand and I want you to keep a steady but gentle

pressure on this pencil and continue to do so. As long as you do so, you will no longer have the desire to gag." The second procedure is also used with complete authority. The therapist or dentist can simply tell the patient to "look between my eyes and I will count from 5 to 1. By the time I get to one, your need to gag will completely disappear." This technique works properly by the use of the authority figure, doctor-patient relationship or therapist-patient relationship.^{1,7}

Fear and anxiety

For effective and efficient dental practice a dentist has to handle all forms of anxiety, ranging from mild uneasiness to fully fledged phobia. With the advent of many technical and pharmacological methods in dentistry, most patients are still extremely anxious of a dental visit. Hence, the night before an appointment many patients suffer from sleeplessness, loss of appetite, feelings of being cornered, and cramps all over which are triggered simply by the thought that they have to go to the dentist. The patient naturally senses the increasing tension and responds by becoming even tenser. This vicious circle just leads to unconscious sparring that makes it difficult to treat the patient efficiently. Clinical hypnosis can be used for anxiolysis and stress reduction in such cases. This psychological procedure uses suggestion (L: *suggerere*, the act of impressing something on the mind of another) as this means to uniquely modify the conscious state of the patient during treatment.¹

Oral bleeding

Further fear and anxiety are increased by oral bleeding during extractions. Bleeding from a post-extraction wound or immediately following an extraction can be controlled if a strong suggestion is given to the hypnotized patient that the blood flow in the particular area will be reduced for some hours. Thus hypnotic suggestions are helpful before extractions.^{8,9}

Salivation

excess salivation will result not only in poor dentist efficiency but is also one of the major cause of spread of infection and thus salivation should be less as much as possible. Direct suggestions that the patient's saliva will dry up for a limited period will result in a definite lessening of the flow of saliva. This can be highly beneficial in patients who has profuse or ropery saliva which constitutes an increasing hazard during the preparation of a cavity in a mandibular teeth.¹⁰

Pedodontic patients

Maximal pronocity to dental phobia is seen in pedodontic patients and thus they are most unco-operative patients to treat. Children are easy to induce into a trance. This is because they experience trance states all the time. This comes from playing many games that take place in a fantasy world, which they can easily hop in and out of.

Hypnotizing children means dealing with them in a loving manner. It differs from that of adults primarily in the use of imagery and words that are better suited to the young patients. It helps to apply hypnosis techniques that divert the child's attention before commencing treatment, since children love confusing, crazy, and magical stories. Use of simple *magical lions or hand/finger puppets* can help the little patients to disassociate themselves from the treatment. In fact, children can go into a deep trance with open eyes, and can speak without breaking the trance. Trance induction is like a game for the child, which he/she follows eagerly as long as it is exciting and fun. Dentists who use hypnosis also talk differently. For instance, they decorate their instruments and materials with pictures and symbols that children find snazzy and react to positively. These dentists treat children differently by using hypnotism as a means to do fun things with the kids.⁷

Bruxism

Tension and anxiety are signs of bruxism, as bruxism can result in muscle pain, tooth loss and TMJ disorders. Using hypnosis to increase the patient's ability to relax and deal with any anxiety is almost always helpful. Progressive muscular relaxation with emphasis on the muscles of mastication and other muscles of the head and neck can bring great relief. Suggestions to leave the teeth slightly apart, perhaps with the tongue just resting on the occlusal surfaces, can be also incorporated into relaxation program.¹¹

CONCLUSION

The routine dental treatment or dentist efficiency and patients response is mainly hampered by anxiety, fear, stress or so called dental phobia. To overcome this dental

hypnosis is non-invasive and acceptable alternative option to improve the conditions and comfort level for patients. Hypnosis may be used independently with the help of a professional hypnotist or as an adjunct with other forms of treatment.

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