

Dentistry Clinical

Hypnosis at work

Mike Gow treats phobic dental patients using hypnosis and his work has appeared on TV. Here, he extols the virtues of a much-maligned and misunderstood method of pain control

My introduction to hypnosis was more fascinating than any episode I've seen of *CSI*.

As a child, I remember being amazed by the stories my father – a doctor – told me about his work with hypnosis. He used it to aid in the recall of witnesses to serious crimes and to track down the 'bad guys'. My father trained in hypnosis with the British Society of Medical and Dental Hypnosis (Scotland) in the 1970s. This dramatic introduction to hypnosis convinced me it really does work.

My elective project, as a dental student, was on hypnosis. The BSMDH Scotland, of which I am very proud to be president, now offers an elective prize to dental students to encourage them to study hypnosis.

Early in my dentistry career, following the BSMDH training courses in hypnosis, my first case was a very anxious man who required multiple extractions and immediate dentures. He was reluctant to have sedation, and showed an interest in hypnosis. I asked him if there was a 'relaxing' or 'special place' he could create in his mind, where he would prefer to imagine being during the procedure. His 'special place' was Ibrox Stadium, watching Rangers beating Celtic!

On the day of the surgery, and after a basic induction technique, I commented a fictitious football game, using occasional simple ego-strengthening techniques, while carrying out the local anaesthetic injections and extractions. Being a Rangers supporter myself allowed me to be really convincing and enthusiastic in my match report. Of course, the home team scored several goals and won the game! What really amazed me was when towards the end of the procedure the patient gleefully sang, *Oh the Bluebells are Blue*. Afterwards he said the atmosphere in the stadium had been electric and he just had to join in! He was so delighted with the treatment that he walked out of the surgery with sparkling eyes and his new smile in full effect, saying: 'That was fantastic! I was really there! Wow, hypnosis really does work!'

Reluctance

A few weeks later, an elderly lady attended for a check up, complaining of pain on the right side of her face. On examination there was absence of any pathology in the remaining teeth in the upper right quadrant, and a lack of any history or evidence of sinus problems, etc. I referred her to the local hospital's oral medicine clinic who, after thorough investigations, reported back that the pain had a psychogenic origin. On review, I explained to the patient that although her pain was very real, there was an absence of any actual organic cause. I then mentioned that hypnosis was very effective in pain control, especially in such cases. I vividly recall the look on her face as she said to me: 'Hypnosis? Aye right sonny!' and I noticed, as she left the surgery, her reluctance to look me in the eye.

Some time later her husband attended for his check-up. He told me that his wife's problem had got worse and that she was crying herself to sleep at night and often woke with the pain. They had seen several doctors, and been to many clinics, but nothing had helped. He said that his wife remembered me mentioning hypnosis, and asked if she could come in to chat to me about it.

She came. We discussed hypnosis, how it is used and how it works. She said: 'I am now ready to try anything.'

Following quite a basic session (as I was still a novice), using simple induction, deepening, ego-strengthening and pain-control techniques, I arranged a return appointment. The main pain control technique used was the 'comfort dial', allowing her to control the pain by visualising an imaginary dial going up and down. I explained that she would be able to use these skills and to control the pain, by setting a level acceptable to her.

At her review appointment, I was astonished. She looked like a different person and told me that she had been pain-free since the last visit. She said: 'I just thought to myself, I should just turn the dial to zero and leave it there for good.'

These early experiences taught me that hypnosis really does work and is a very useful tool. I immediately integrated it into my dental practice.

Since my training with British Society of Medical and Dental Hypnosis (Scotland) (BSMDH Scotland), I have



The case that featured on BBC Two's 'Alternative Therapies'

successfully treated hundreds of cases using hypnosis and can assure you that it really does work. I have found it especially effective in treating phobias, bruxism and gagging. I have appeared on TV several times demonstrating how effective hypnosis is in acute pain control.

In one case, hypnosis was used instead of local anaesthetics in a sinus lift procedure and implant placement and in another, recently shown on BBC2, I demonstrated hypnosis being used instead of local anaesthetics for the extraction of two upper central incisors and immediate implant placement. If you missed this, I believe that if you visit www.youtube.com, you can find it if you search for clips on 'dental hypnosis'.

In fact, the spectrum of applications of hypnosis in dentistry is surprisingly wide and the evidence-based literature in these applications is ever growing.

The uses of hypnosis in dentistry include:

- Anxiety management/relaxation
- Compliment inhalation/intravenous/oral sedation
- Phobia management (Specific phobias e.g. general dental, needle, dental needle, blood, drill etc)
- Gagging (during procedures or denture/appliance intolerance)
- Para-functional habits e.g. bruxism, tongue-thrusting
- TMJ dysfunction
- Modification of other unwanted oral habits (e.g. thumb-sucking, nail-biting, etc)
- Acute pain control
- Chronic facial pain
- Psycho-somatic facial pain
- Salivation control
- Bleeding control
- Improved compliance with oral hygiene regimes
- Smoking cessation
- Treatment of anxiety/stress-related recurrent aphthous stomatitis.
- Reduction of symptoms of burning mouth syndrome.

I have published a few papers and case studies recently in an attempt to highlight the evidence base of some of these various aspects of dental hypnosis. The evidence in the literature is there, and is on the increase. More importantly those who train in hypnosis and use it clinically will tell you that hypnosis really does work.

The training provided by BSMDH (Scotland) specifically for doctors and dentists is designed to cover all the safety aspects of using hypnosis in medical and dental practice. The training is continuous throughout all the society meetings and you will be mixing with your colleagues doing hypnosis, allowing you to discuss cases and techniques. Day-to-day practice will change completely after you train with the BSMDH (Scotland) those difficult 'heart sink' patients disappear!

The hypnosis training modules offered by the British Society of Medical and Dental Hypnosis (Scotland) are

designed to meet the needs of 21st-century medicine and dentistry. For more information, please contact mail@bsmdh-scot.com, call 0141 229 0222 or visit www.bsmdh-scot.com.

The British Society of Medical and Dental Hypnosis (Scotland) invites you to join us and to find out for yourself that hypnosis really does work! ■

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Mike A Gow BDS (Gla) MSc Hyp (Lon) is president of the British Society of Medical and Dental Hypnosis (Scotland) (BSMDH Scotland). He graduated from the University of Glasgow Dental School in 1999. In 2001 he created the website www.WhatFear.com to help people worldwide overcome their dental phobia. In 2004, he gained a masters in hypnosis applied to dentistry from University College London and is one of only a few dentists in the UK to hold this qualification. Mike is currently studying for a masters in dental anxiety management at the University of Edinburgh. Mike regularly teaches dentists about hypnosis on the BSMDH (Scotland) and other courses, including those run by the Hypnosis Unit UK (visit www.hypnosisunituk.com).



Mike has appeared on TV documentaries demonstrating the use of hypnosis in dental pain control. He uses hypnosis clinically for a wide range of dental problems (e.g. dental phobia management, bruxism, smoking cessation, etc). Mike accepts private referrals for conscious sedation, dental hypnosis and dental anxiety management at 'Dentistry By Faqir & Friel', Kilmarnock (01563 521897) and 'The Berkeley Clinic', Glasgow (0141 564 1900). He can be contacted by email on: whatfearcom@hotmail.com.