

Advantages of hypnosis

FOR THE PATIENT

In reducing patient apprehension

The person whose dental office behavior is not what one would like it to be frequently reacts as he does because of the apprehensions he has about treatment. Even the patient who appears stoic usually has some manner of demonstrating his fears apart from actual flinching from treatment. Many dentists have begun to discontinue placing a cup of water at the side of the patient. The tendency, in so many patients, is to spend an inordinate amount of time in rinsing. Such patients are not wasting moments washing their mouths because they have no appreciation of time; they are employing a defense mechanism to postpone the dentist's resumption of treatment.

CASE OF MR. EDWARD B.

It is common dental experience that as soon as one removes his fingers and instruments from the mouths of some patients, the patients will almost invariably bring their heads forward and away from the headrest. Thus, each time the dentist returns to the patient, he must reposition the patient's head. But Edward B demonstrated a new variety of delaying tactic. He not only brought his head forward; he

also had to perform certain compulsive gyrations before returning it to the head rest. What in essence did these represent? Nothing more than a postponing of dental treatment. The induction of only light hypnosis is usually enough to handle such cases. If there is any fear in the dentist's mind that he is going to spend so much time using hypnosis that he won't have any time to practice dentistry, he can be assured that with a patient like Mr. Edward B hypnosis will be the most time-saving method he can employ.

In anesthesia

Hypnoanesthesia can be employed in dentistry as a substitute for, or as an adjunct to, chemoanesthesia. While many patients never reach the depth of hypnosis at which hypnoanesthesia may be obtained, it seems logical to use it when they *can* reach that depth. It certainly *must* be attempted in those individuals for whom all other varieties of anesthesia are contraindicated. In general anesthesia, the amount of anesthetic may be significantly reduced when it is augmented with hypnosis.

Some persons are motivated to study hypnosis in dentistry because they expect to be able to find a substitute for anesthesia. They hope that in hypnosis they will find a medium which will allow them to throw out their syringes, their ampules, and their inhalant anesthetics. One seminarian once announced, "The only reason I came here is to learn to pull teeth with hypnosis." One doesn't extract teeth with hypnosis. During hypnosis, however, routine dental procedures are facilitated.

In gagging and nausea

Gagging and nausea can be controlled or minimized during hypnosis. (See demonstration of the technique to be used on a patient with an exaggerated gagging reflex, page 390).

In eliminating patient fatigue

Even where hypnosis is no longer needed for elimination of apprehension, it does offer an additional advantage in that it may be employed to reduce or eliminate patient fatigue. Without hypnosis, the patient is often fatigued by long-drawn-out sessions in the dental chair. In this regard Erickson has mentioned the studies made in laboratories of the hypnotized patient's ability to keep his arm elevated for extended periods. The same thing is accomplished by the dentist who suggests to the patient that his open mouth can lock in that position. The mouth does lock and the patient is completely unaware of any resultant fatigue. In Erickson's work on time distortion, he has shown that the patient frequently has a completely distorted idea of the length of time his mouth has been open. An hour and a half of dentistry may be accomplished, but as far as the patient is concerned, he may feel that his mouth has been open for only five minutes.

In postoperative healing

Much has been written about the possibilities of facilitating postoperative healing. The verbalization following tooth extraction may be as follows: "Mrs. Patient, your tooth has been removed successfully, but I want you to relax for a little while longer as I talk to you. The socket from which your tooth was removed is clean and the gum seems to be in fine condition. I believe that when you return here next you will tell me that you had uneventful healing following removal of a tooth."

FOR THE DENTIST

As an aid to ordinary procedures

Some dentists approach hypnosis with the idea that perhaps they will be able to cancel, through a knowledge of this art, the effects of defective inlay margins, incompletely filled root canals, overextended borders, or premature contacts in dentures. Hypnosis is not going to substitute for good dentistry.

If, however, the dentist approaches hypnosis with the idea that it is another method for amplifying the good he can already do, he has the right approach. There are areas in which hypnosis can be used in varying degrees on most patients: removing fears and apprehensions, persuading the patient to accept the treatment he fears, helping to obtain

impressions and bite registrations, and for suggestions (post-hypnotic) to ensure correct follow-up by the patient in the management of dentures, orthodontic appliances, and oral hygiene. In other words, a dentist can do far more good for many more people if he accepts hypnosis as an adjunct to, and not as a substitute for, any technique of dentistry. Correctly viewed, hypnosis is a means of assistance in performing the dentistry that one already does, a means of doing it more easily, more quickly, and more comfortably, both for the patient and the dentist.

As an aid to reduction of tension on the part of the dentist

The dentist who works on tense and nervous patients absorbs these tensions. The cumulative effect of working on several such patients is detrimental to his health and emotional stability. A dentist who teaches his patients to relax and also applies the techniques to himself will preserve his health and prolong his usefulness. At the very least, he will improve his relationships with his patients and his family.

Hypnotic orientation

FOR THE DENTIST

How should the dentist approach induction procedures? In the first place, every normal person can be hypnotized under proper conditions by a skilled operator. But the dentist

must clearly realize that the patient who resists hypnosis cannot be readily hypnotized. This should be emphasized with the patient; he should know that he actually hypnotizes himself and can do so when hypnosis is indicated and when he is working with a qualified operator. In stressing this point, a better relationship is established with patients.

FOR THE PATIENT

Reactions to the term "hypnosis"

Some patients do not feel at home with the word "hypnosis." Some dentists feel the same way. They are afraid that if they use the word, they may antagonize their patients. If they feel this way and use the word with this feeling, the probability is that they will prejudice their patients. They need to find a euphemism until they can get over this feeling. One doctor in Illinois was so uncomfortable about "hypnosis" that he renamed the process. He told his patients, "You seem to be tense. I am going to teach you countertension." He taught his patients "countertension" successfully. During a recent meeting, he was asked, "How are you getting along with countertension?" "Oh," he replied, "I don't use that term any more. My patients like hypnosis!" His patients began to understand what it was; more important, the dentist came to understand what it was.