SOME USES OF HYPNOSIS IN GENERAL PRACTICE

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Hypnosis is a form of therapy that has for many years been frowned on; nevertheless, in psychosomatic medicine and the psychoneuroses it has often produced beneficial results when more orthodox measures have failed. It is from precisely these two fields that many "problem patients" in general practice are provided—patients who have gone from consultant to consultant and from out-patient department to out-patient department and have ended with the label "incurable" or "functional," with a regular bottle of medicine or tablets. It was decided to try hypnotherapy on some of these patients to see if they would derive benefit from it; the results obtained are given below.

Method of Treatment

All patients were seen weekly for an average of 8–10 weeks for a period of from 30 to 50 minutes, the time varying with the therapeutic measures used after the hypnotic induction. The consulting-room was warm and quiet and the couch wide and comfortable. No special apparatus was required.

Before induction was started the patient was questioned for any doubts or misapprehensions about hypnosis, and any fears were allayed by a simple explanation and reassurance that the phenomenon is perfectly normal and physiological, and no harmful effects would arise.

The induction was then begun. The technique used in all cases but one was of eye fixation together with progressive relaxation and strong suggestions of sleep. This is a simple but very efficient method, and usually a trance state was induced in 5–15 minutes. At subsequent inductions the time of induction was much shorter—often instantaneously at a given signal. The one case that was an exception needed a more authoritative approach—that is, eye-gaze—as he felt unable to relax under the more soothing approach.

For this type of therapy, when analgesia or anaesthesia was not the aim of treatment, a light trance was sufficient to obtain therapeutic results (where they were obtainable). It was found that of the cases selected for treatment, 90% were able to be hypnotized, which agrees with the usually accepted figure that any one hypnotist will be able to hypnotize only 90% of his patients.

The decision on the type of treatment required when the patient was in the trance state depended on the nature of the case. Thus, in general, asthmatics were treated by suggestion, hysterics by emotional abreaction, and cases of anxiety by psychotherapy; but this was not a rigid framework, as in all cases a search for the emotional basis of the complaint was made. Experience and the "feel" of the patient gave the best guide to the approach required.

Duration of Treatment.—As stated above, the average number of sessions per patient was 8–10. Individual cases varied from one session, in which cure was achieved, to weekly sessions lasting over many months. It is, in fact, the length of treatment that makes hypnosis difficult to use in general practice.

Results

In the Table are recorded the results of treating 41 patients during the period May, 1954, to April, 1956. There were 12 cases of asthma, 7 of various skin diseases, 16 psychiatric cases, 2 of an anxiety state superimposed on an organic disease, a stammerer, an enuretic, and 2 cases of obesity.

Some working criterion for successful treatment had to be evaluated. Primarily, of course, the complete disappear-

Results of Treatment

Complaint	No. of Cases	Cure	Partial Cure	Failure
Asthma	12	9	2	1
Eczema	3	2	1	
Psoriasis	1			1
Rosacea	1	1		
Warts	1			1
Cicatricial alopecia	1			1
Anxiety state	8	2	2	4
Hysteria	2	1	1	
Emotional shock (traumatic)	3	3		
Inferiority feelings	1	1		
Compulsion neurosis	1			1
Nail-biting	1	1		
Stammering	1		1	
Enuresis	1			1
Anxiety-tension on organic disease	2	2		
Obesity	2	1		1
	41	23	7	11

ance of the symptoms complained of, their non-reappearance over a period of time, and the failure of emergence of fresh symptoms would constitute complete success. Of the 41 patients treated, these criteria were fulfilled in 23. Partial success is claimed when the original condition had not disappeared but had considerably improved and no fresh symptoms had emerged. This occurred in 7 cases. Failure, of course, means no improvement at all, and this occurred in 11 cases. In no case was the patient made worse by treatment.

All cases have been followed up for periods varying from six months to two and a half years to see that the criteria listed above are fulfilled. Reports of some illustrative cases are given.

Asthma

Case 1.—A boy aged 12 had suffered from asthma since the age of 2 years. As a baby he had had infantile eczema. The asthma had severely incapacitated him, so that he was unable to participate in normal school activities, and indeed was backward from the loss of schooling. He was treated simply by hypnotic suggestion for 10 sessions and rapidly improved. He has been free of asthma entirely for 12 months, is capable of most physical exertions, and has lost no more schooling.

Case 2.—A clerk aged 17 had had asthma since an attack of pneumonia when aged 6 years. He had severe attacks only about four times a year, but he always wheezed on any undue exertion and was unable to play any games. He was treated by hypnotic suggestion for 10 sessions, and his symptoms cleared completely. There has been no relapse in 18 months.

Case 3.—A pharmaceutical chemist aged 37 had suffered from asthma since the age of 6 months, apart from a free spell between the ages of 15 and 23 years. He had attacks every night, and had tried every remedy in the *Pharmacopoeia*—all to no avail. He was treated by suggestion, together with psychotherapy under hypnosis, when his asthma restarted soon after the death of his mother, which he felt intensely. His attacks considerably lessened but did not cease altogether, and he was taught autorelaxation—to control an attack before it has developed, by breaking the vicious tension circle. This was reinforced by post-hypnotic suggestions, and after 10 sessions he has not had an attack that could not be cut short by this technique over the past two and a half years.

Case 4.—A photographer aged 58 had had asthma for six years. It started when he was cleaning a basement and had developed to daily or nocturnal attacks. No source of anxiety or guilt was uncovered, but hypnotic suggestion effected a complete cure in five sessions with no relapse over two and a half years.

Dermatology

Case 5.—A carpenter aged 71, a widower and keen amateur singer, had suffered from eczema on the glans penis

for two years that was resistant to all treatment. In addition, for the same period he experienced a tightness in the throat and chest which prevented him from drawing a deep breath, and thus his singing had deteriorated. He was in perfect health otherwise, and no cause could be adduced for his complaints when a normal history was taken. However, on questioning under hypnosis, the story emerged of sexual intercourse with a woman he believed to be a widow but who was nevertheless married. When he learnt this fact he had experienced tremendous guilt about his adultery, and anxiety that people would get to know. A couple of weeks later the eczema (guilt) and the tightness of the chest (anxiety) appeared. After unburdening his story he felt immediately relieved, and on being withdrawn from the trance he burst into a long joyous aria from *Don Giovanni*. After two more sessions the eczema and chest tightness had vanished, and two years later he remained cured.

Case 6.—A clerk aged 18 had suffered from asthma since he was five years old and an eczema of the hands and arms since starting work in a paper factory at the age of 15 ("industrial dermatitis"). In addition, for the past six months he had had warts on his hands. The asthma had caused his discharge from Army service. He was treated by hypnotic suggestion, as no emotional basis was easily to be found. The asthma cleared immediately, and after eight sessions the eczema had gone too. The warts remained and were accordingly curetted away, using hypnotic anaesthesia. He has had no recurrence of any complaint after two years three months. This case is of some interest since one complaint that is renowned for disappearance by suggestion—that is, warts—was not influenced at all by this most powerful form of suggestion.

Case 7.—A compositor aged 45 had suffered from a severe eczema for 20 years. It had a supposedly occupational aetiology and often covered most of his body. He had a very inadequate personality, feeling inferior to his work-mates, lacking in initiative, and leading a solitary existence in lodgings. He was, of course, unmarried, and was afraid of women. He had received much treatment over the years, both dermatological and psychiatric, but he had not improved. He was treated by hypnotic suggestion to stop the irritation, and thus the scratching, and to allow healing to take place; in addition he was given a long course of psychotherapy extending over nine months. His skin condition improved rapidly and became 90% better, and in due course he developed a change in his personality and behaviour. He became much more aggressive at work, he developed a taste for music and poetry, lost his dreadful guilt about masturbation that made him feel dirty, and because of this he changed from a dirty, badly dressed man to a clean one with a fair degree of clothes-sense—that is, he no longer felt dirty, in both senses of the word. He terminated treatment at his own request, as he felt he no longer needed it. During the course of psychotherapy he had one relapse in his skin complaint, and that occurred when I went to hospital for an emergency appendicectomy. However, it rapidly cleared when treatment was restarted. For 18 months there has been no relapse in his skin or medical state since terminating treatment.

Psychiatric

Case 8.—A housewife aged 60 had suffered for 10 years from nervousness, lassitude, and insomnia. She never felt well, and a year before starting treatment she developed symptoms of diabetes mellitus—that is, loss of weight, polyuria, and polydipsia—but no evidence of this disease was found. The origin of her troubles was the severe emotional shock produced by the explosion of a land mine near 17 during the last war—that is, bomb-shock. She had been uninjured—physically—but some close friends and relatives had been killed. There was conscious memory of the event, but the emotional affect was missing. Under hypnosis she was abreacted to the explosion—a great emotional release obtained during the reliving of the episode. On awakening

from the trance she felt much better, and since that one session two and a half years ago she has had no further trouble and no symptoms.

Case 9.—A similar case to the above was that of a woman aged 39 who had been severely injured about the head during an air-raid. Her face and scalp were much scarred and she suffered from severe unilateral headaches on the side of the scarring, insomnia, and an inability to concentrate for long periods. She also was abreacted to the explosion with a similar vivid emotional release. After this session headaches greatly diminished in intensity and frequency, she was able to concentrate and could sleep without sedatives. Possibly the residual headaches were due to some underlying damage to the coverings of the brain which was not detectable clinically.

Case 10.—A housewife aged 54 had suffered from a partial loss of voice for six months—she was only able to whisper. This symptom had developed after a bad cold, and nothing could be found to account for this physically, since all investigations were normal. She was given a course of E.C.T. by the psychiatrists, as it was thought to be perhaps menopausal in origin; however, it did not help her. The only relevant history was the marriage of her daughter four months before the symptoms began. Under hypnosis she was taken back to the wedding and immediately began to sob and speak in her normal voice. The story emerged that she felt terribly guilty regarding the time of this marriage, since it associated with her own wedding, which had taken place when her father was dying. On emerging from the trance her voice went back to a whisper. At the next session the story continued that her father had had three strokes, and had lost his voice and been unable to speak to her. It was pointed out to her that she was identifying herself with her father, and on awakening this time her voice was perfectly normal and has remained so for the past 15 months.

Case 11.—A housewife aged 44 had been involved in a car accident six months previous to treatment and suffered from severe headaches, dizzy spells, and fits of depression. No injury apart from a little head bruising had been sustained. She was abreacted to the crash, and following this session has remained well and symptom-free for two years.

Case 12.—A male window-dresser aged 35 suffered from feelings of inadequacy and inferiority. He blushed when spoken to, and he felt unable to advance in his job as it entailed speaking at occasional company meetings, which he could not do. He was treated by simple suggestion under hypnosis for 12 sessions—no simple psychological origins being found. This resulted in a tremendous improvement in all his symptoms, and he became endowed with a strong comforting feeling of confidence in himself. This has continued with no relapse for 18 months.

Case 13.—A female cashier aged 21 had 18 months previously developed a severe tremor of the hands when holding a cup of tea. This had a sudden onset when having tea with newly married friends. This tremor was getting worse and was a source of great anxiety, and sedation would not help. There was no physical abnormality. She was a very self-conscious, awkward girl, but usually got on well with her friends. She was treated by direct suggestion under hypnosis, but some psychic probing eventually revealed that this newly married friend of hers had laughed at her for being "gawky" just before the onset of her symptoms and this had made her both very annoyed and very upset. In 12 sessions the tremor and anxiety had vanished completely, she moved with far more grace and dignity, and over the past nine months has had no recurrence.

Case 14.—A schoolgirl aged 16 had from the age of 7 years suffered from an inability to write in the normal manner. If she tried to hold a pen or pencil in the usual way the hand would jerk violently and uncontrollably so that nothing could be written. In order to write legibly—and she did attend a grammar school—the right hand had to be doubled up completely and the pencil would slope in the opposite direction from the normal. No cause had been found for this over the years. Under hypnosis she

very tearfully produced the story that at the age of 7 years, while writing on a card in the children's library to reserve a book, she saw the two librarians looking at her and laughing. She believed they were laughing at her, and from that time she had developed this abnormal hiding method of writing. On emergence from the trance she was able to write perfectly normally if the paper was sloping towards her, but she still wrote abnormally if the paper was horizontal. Further sessions revealed little fresh trouble, and no further improvement could be effected. However, she now feels, 18 months later, that, although she still cannot write perfectly normally, she no longer has any anxiety about it, as she appreciates the reason for it. Undoubtedly there is a far deeper emotional disturbance causing this symptom to persist partially, but it was not revealed during her sessions.

Case 15.—A social worker aged 27 had always picked and bitten her nails. She got worse when her fiancé was killed suddenly. Suggestion and abreaction to the death under hypnosis produced rapid results in two sessions, with no relapse after two years.

Organic Disorder with Superadded Anxiety

Case 16.—A reader's copyholder aged 52 had suffered from coronary thrombosis which occurred during an attack of pneumonia six months before treatment began. Since then he had complained of severe dyspnoea at rest, tiredness, insomnia, and an inability to do anything for himself, coupled with severe anxiety. His symptoms were out of all proportion to his cardiac efficiency, and nothing would help him. He was treated by hypnosis and immediately uncovered anxiety, not about his heart but his memory. He had always prided himself on his excellent memory, but with advancing years it had deteriorated. This caused him to fail a special examination concerning his occupation, and, even worse to him, he was unable to memorize various aspects of Freemasonry ritual and so failed to attain higher office. He felt much better after this, and his symptoms improved. A later session revealed guilt and anxiety at an episode of extramarital intercourse. He was soon back at work but unfortunately developed another coronary thrombosis, and a little later a third caused his death.

Case 17.—A printing manager aged 47 had developed disseminated sclerosis six months previously; he knew the diagnosis and prognosis. The complaint manifested itself with weakness of the face (unilateral) and legs, abdominal cramps, and various paraesthesiae. He became very tense and introspective into his complaint, lost his confidence, and was unable to work in spite of sedatives, tonics, etc. He was treated by hypnotic suggestion, as no particular anxieties were revealed apart from those associated with the disease. He rapidly improved, and within four sessions was back at work and feeling much better about his complaint. Treatment continued for nine sessions in all. He has maintained this improvement over the past 18 months apart from a spell of vertigo and facial anaesthesia caused by his complaint.

Obesity

Case 18.—A housewife aged 35 had become obese, her weight having risen from 9½ stone to 12 stone 5 lb. (60.8 to 78.5 kg.). She was unable to remain on a weight-reducing diet, even with amphetamines, as she felt a compulsion to eat the most fattening foods such as chocolates, sweets, and cream cakes, even after filling herself with a weight-reducing meal. She had had a most unhappy life: her mother had committed suicide, she was separated from a husband whom she despised, and had had two sons, one by the husband and another by a lover. She was deeply disturbed and felt that everyone was against her. Under hypnosis she had extreme emotional outbursts for the first three sessions, crying and shouting while pouring out the unhappy events in her life. After this she quietened down and was able to discuss her problems with some detachment. She was treated for six months, and at the end of this time had lost 2 stone (12.7 kg.) in weight and also her compulsion for

food: the necessary consolation and punishment was no longer necessary. Over the past nine months there has been no relapse.

Discussion

It must first be emphasized that this series of 41 cases does not allow of any statistical evaluation of the efficacy of hypnotherapy. The total number is too small and the type of complaint too varied to allow for this. The only possible significant result is obtained in the asthma group—9 out of 12 cases were completely cured and 2 partially cured. The other case relapsed soon after treatment ended and would not respond at all on a second attempt. However, the relief in individual human suffering cannot always be measured with a yardstick.

With regard to the actual therapy itself, a few points should be noted. Firstly, as previously mentioned, it is very time-consuming for the practitioner and a good deal of leisure must be forgone. This is counterbalanced, however, by the fact that successful treatment does remove the patient from continuous surgery attendance. Secondly, few unpleasant after-effects have been produced. Occasionally some light-headedness or dizziness was complained of after the first session, but this was easily countered by post-hypnotic suggestion. Thirdly, the patient does not become dependent on the therapist after treatment ceases. The dependency is a common misconception, but it did not occur to one patient in this series. However, as in orthodox psychotherapy, particularly when prolonged, a dependency relationship does develop during treatment, but this is no longer present after treatment is terminated. This point is well illustrated by Case 7.

The failures in treatment are listed in the Table, but again no conclusions can be drawn on inefficacy of treatment. These patients were all readily hypnotizable but did not respond to treatment in any form.

In addition to the 41 cases treated who were able to be induced into the trance state, five others had been selected for treatment but were un hypnotizable. This accords with the usual figure quoted (90%) for ability to induce hypnosis by any one therapist.

In this series the psychosomatic cases—that is, asthmas and eczemas—have responded well to suggestion and hypnotic psychotherapy. The teaching of autorelaxation to the asthmatics was very valuable to some of them. Among the psychiatric cases those with a history of a specific emotional trauma did particularly well after abreaction, and cures were rapidly obtained. In the pure anxiety states it was not so successful, as the deeper technique of hypnoanalysis was undoubtedly required and the time factor here became of greater importance. But in the relief of anxiety-tension complicating an organic disease, hypnosis was very useful and appears to have a wide application here, since in many organic disorders the anxiety grossly aggravates the organically determined symptoms.

Not everyone can or wants to practise medical hypnosis, but it is a valuable therapeutic measure when other methods have failed. It is only by further experience that its potentialities and limitations can be satisfactorily defined and ascertained.

Summary

A series of 41 patients have been treated by hypnosis, using varying techniques after induction. The results obtained are described and enumerated. No statistical conclusions can be drawn, but its value is suggestive.

The Medical Laboratory Technician, No. 57 in the new "Choice of Careers" series issued by the Central Youth Employment Executive, has been revised. This booklet includes chapters on work in hospital and other medical laboratories, professional training and personal qualities required, openings, and salaries. It is published by Her Majesty's Stationery Office, price 6d. net.