

Helping through hypnosis

Dentists and their staff often think of hypnosis as a way of helping patients to remain calm when receiving treatment. **Anthony Asquith** explains how it can also help the team members to stay calm too.

Hypnosis and dentistry have been closely linked for some time, over a hundred years. Early accounts exist from as far back as 1836 when Jean-Victor Oudet, a Paris physician, undertook extraction of a tooth from a patient who was hypnotised.

There are many useful publications in existence which can guide a student methodically through the process of hypnotic inductions for calming patients for dentalwork. A whole array of strategies have been well documented that can work efficiently with patients who are traumatised by their fear of the needle, or drills, to name a few of the potential pit falls.

So why should dental professionals learn skills like self hypnosis and how does this help?

Natural cycles are present in the body and these regulate physical functions such as hunger, reaction times and sex drive. Perhaps the best known is the circadian rhythm (the roughly 24 hour day/night cycle). Along side this, playing a less obvious but important role is a cycle known as the ultradian rhythm.

Every 90-120 minutes we all experience troughs of low energy and efficiency. During this period, hemispherical activity in the brain switches over to a more holistic



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daydreaming thought style. Most people notice this around 3.00pm or 4.00pm in the afternoon.

The modern day pressures of daily practice life usually require that the practitioner or team member take a coffee, or eat some chocolate to maintain their energy, in other words do what is needed to get through this period.

Over-riding this requirement for your body to relax will cause stress hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol to be produced. Although these hormones make you ready for action, they also have the detrimental effect of suppressing your immune system. In the longer term, continuing this cycle could lead to numerous other health complications. No one would expect for example, a professional footballer to play continuously for 90 minutes without a break but many rational people will think nothing of working from dawn until dusk without taking timeout to relax.

Simple self hypnosis tunes into these unconscious rhythms and can allow your conscious mind to take a back seat and take time out to enjoy a calmer state of mind. There are many ways of doing this, one method is to find a quiet place without interruption (see box).

The use in the dental practice is that the team member can easily feel refreshed, balanced and be more productive for longer than if they had chosen to work through these rhythms or had a coffee break in order to have stayed wide awake.

How can it be of practical use?

There are many courses across the country which cover the use of hypnosis in dentistry. Manchester-based dental practitioner Dr Nadim Majid recently attended one such course which included amongst its remit the use of hypnosis in dentistry.

Asked his reason for attending, Dr Majid replied, "I picked up an article on hypnosis in dentistry, after that I became more interested in the subject. We were doing RA and IV sedation in the practice and it was something I had been interested in but had not got around to reading up on. I started reading more on the subject and became particularly interested in self hypnosis because I was able to help myself become calmer and a lot more relaxed."

When asked what he had learned that had helped him in his daily work Dr Majid

Give it a try

Begin now by slowing down to pay attention to your breathing. Breathe slowly in through the nose and out through the mouth. As you continue this, be especially aware how you feel with each inward and outward breath.

Chances are you may begin to notice that the outward breath, when extended longer than the inward breath, can become more soothing to you.

Now pay inward attention to the feelings in the different parts of your body like your hands which may now or in a few minutes, become warmer. The gentle rise and fall of your chest as, reading this, you become calmer still.

At this point, it may be useful for you to imagine travelling to a special place and what that must be like in your mind. Maybe even close your eyes slowly to allow yourself to go there and enjoy a few peaceful moments.

With practice you can get good at inducing more and more quickly the initial relaxation response.

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replied, "The course has helped me refine my existing skills and use them, also it's given me the option of furthering my knowledge as well. I think that's what's helped."

"I have also been able to use it in work situations. Just yesterday one of my colleagues was a bit upset and during lunch time I was able to speak with her which helped her relax. It has pointed me in a new direction, opened me up to new areas and that's been quite beneficial. I do think perhaps the most important part for me was the introduction to self hypnosis as a relaxation technique to calm myself and others down."

Anthony Asquith is a presenter for Bright Ideas Training, a training company for dental professionals.

Hypnosis in dentistry is one of the topics you can receive training on, at the Bright Ideas Training one day workshop, 'How to use hypnosis and NLP (neuro-linguistic programming) for calmer patients and a calmer you'. Courses are available throughout the country and you can obtain further details from Anthony Asquith on 01273 423385 or Andrew Cain on 01273 732690 or simply visit www.brightideatraining.co.uk

The British Society of Medical and Dental Hypnosis is also a useful source of information, contact them on 07000 560309 email natoffice@bsmdh.com or a list of courses is available on their website: <http://www.bsmdh.com/>. A list of courses is available on their website.