

Is Hypnotic Treatment Safe?

The surgeon snapped his fingers at the man on the operating table. The man's eyes closed. Straight away the surgeon went to work to remove the patient's appendix. No anaesthetics had been administered—yet the operation was completely painless.

For 24-year-old Don Cunningham, the man on the operating table in the Davies County Hospital at Washington, Indiana, had been hypnotized. By snapping his fingers the surgeon had induced a trance.

Cunningham was on the operating table thirty-five minutes, while another doctor stood by ready to apply anaesthetics if the hypnosis failed. But it didn't fail.

When the wound had been closed the surgeon snapped his fingers twice. Don Cunningham emerged from his trance. "I was conscious of a dull feeling in the area, but I felt no pain," he said later. "I kept my eyes closed during the operation, but I guess I could have watched."

This case, reported not long ago, means an isolated instance of hypnosis being used successfully in modern surgery. It is also used to a considerable extent as a substitute for anaesthetics in childbirth and dentistry, and in the treatment of a wide variety of ailments including duodenal ulcers, blood pressure, asthma, migraine, and skin diseases.

Responsible medical opinion has claimed it to be of great value, too, in the treatment of alcoholism, excessive smoking, stammering, blushing, insomnia, seasickness and many other ills, including stage fright.

This does not mean that hypnosis can miraculously cure all types of patients. The success of the treatment depends on the patient's suitability for it. A great degree of co-operation is needed between hypnotist and patient; for this reason it would be very difficult to hypnotize a hysterical person, and impossible to succeed with an imbecile or someone mentally deranged.

Not long ago a Surrey mother revealed how her daughter had been completely cured of asthma through hypnosis.

She had developed this frustrating disease at the age of three, and with excitement, tension or worry would prostrate her for weeks at a time. For five years the parents fought a losing battle, the only advice they obtained from the various doctors they visited being to keep her on certain foods, and put her to bed after attacks.

One day, however, the father read of a case similar to their daughter's, which had been cured by hypnosis. "We immediately contacted the doctor and that was the turning point for Jennifer," said the mother. "For the next two years she has attended once every three months for hypnosis treatment and she is now completely cured."

In his book, "Hypnosis and the Power Within," Dr. S. J. Van Pelt, President of the British Society of Medical Hypnotists, says it is agreed among medical men, that emotion or nervous shock may bring on an asthma attack. Yet hypnosis, which he claims is the most effective treatment in all nervous complaints, has been virtually ignored by orthodox medical opinion.

In the "British Medical Journal" recently, Dr. Richard Asher of the Central Middlesex Hospital, told the strange story of the boy of thirteen and the girl of ten who grew hair on their heads after hypnosis.

The boy, who had been bald for seven years was given fifteen weekly hypnotic treatments and hair then began to grow scantily. When treatments were stopped,

he became bald again. The girl had twelve treatments and her hair continued to grow without further hypnosis.

If hypnosis is so valuable in medicine why hasn't it been used to a far greater extent? Probably the main reason is that much distrust has been created in the public mind by the activities of stage hypnotists and by sensational novels, plays and films about "sinister Svengalis."

This distrust has also existed in the medical profession for many years. And yet Franz Anton Mesmer, the man who first used hypnosis scientifically, had people flocking to his clinic in Paris and Vienna in the 1700s.

Mesmer, who was born in 1734, near Lake Constance in Germany, was regarded as a charlatan by jealous doctors, but he was well-respected as a general practitioner before he turned to hypnosis.

He believed that a strange "magnetic fluid" came from the stars and filled the whole universe. Because the balance of this fluid in their bodies had been disturbed, he discovered, he could cause some of his patients to go into convulsions, and to be cured of their ailments.

A spectacular success came his way when Maria Theresa Paradies, a blind girl who was a brilliant pianist, recovered her sight after undergoing his treatment.

But before the cure was complete the child's parents were angry because of the way she was treated, and she was taken to the girl away. She did not want to leave Mesmer and there was an angry scene in which she was struck across the face by her mother, causing the blindness to return.

Mesmer died in obscurity after he had been discredited by his rivals in the medical profession.

Dr. Van Pelt has claimed that it may be possible for a person of average ability to develop positive genius under the influence of hypnosis. He quotes the case of the Russian composer, Rachmaninoff, who in 1900 was cured of alcoholism under hypnosis.

Disappointed in love and depressed at the failure of his first concerto, Rachmaninoff had taken to drink.

Then he was persuaded to see a psychiatrist, Dr. Niccolay Dahl, a composer visited Dr. Dahl and sat in an armchair half asleep, while the psychiatrist repeated these phrases: "You will begin to write your concerto . . . You will work with great facility . . . The concerto will be excellent."

"There is little doubt that this treatment restored Rachmaninoff's confidence, with the result that his second concerto was a triumphant success. He also stopped drinking and for the rest of his life seldom touched alcohol."

The claims of hypnosis are being made more and more, in the newspapers, on the radio and on TV. It was said not long ago that the Russian ski jumpers and other athletes competed while hypnotized. A team of Russian research workers is said to be engaged on the study of hypnosis as applied to sports, in preparation for the 1950 Olympic Games.

It was hypnosis, too, that film star Cary Grant claimed had helped him stay at the top of the Central Middlesex Hospital. He said that he and his actress wife, Betsy Drake, practised hypnosis on each other. This made him more relaxed.

A British Medical Association committee, in its report on hypnosis, says that great dangers might result from hypnotizing unsuitable people. But it had decided that hypnosis was of value and might be the treatment of choice in certain cases. Much more research was necessary, however.

VACATION SPOT—This large white frame house is the "summer White House" for President Eisenhower and Mrs. Eisenhower. The golf course is only two or three minutes by car.

There Was No Miracle For Little Nils-Olov

Boston (NEA)—Nils-Olov Wissell has gone home to Sweden—to be buried, while doctors at Peter Bent Brigham Hospital try to salvage some information of value from their attempt to perform a medical miracle on the little boy.

Young Nils, an 11-year-old handsome, freckled boy had been born with only one kidney. Doctors only discovered this after he had injured it and it had been removed. It and it had the human organs that purify the blood, and without at least one, death is certain.

While an artificial kidney went to work keeping the youngster alive, Nils was brought to America and 50 doctors in Boston planned an operation that would mean increased life and hope for thousands of other children.

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Fortune Is Where You Fall On It

Opportunity not only knocks more than once; it sticks to you. We are thinking of a certain Swiss gentleman who fell into a batch of burdock. For most people all that such an event portends is an hour of picking out burrs out of clothing and a resolution not to make a habit of burdock patches.

Some people will ask how and why they let themselves fall into such a relentless ambush. But they will probably attribute the misadventure to misfortune.

The Swiss gentleman, however, asked a different set of hows and whys. Why do burrs cling so tenaciously to fabric? More specifically exactly how do they do it?

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Drive With Care

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"Don't use such long words in my speeches," he said. "I want to know what I'm talking about."

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THE FARM FRONT

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Justice in Economic Life

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