

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF HYPNOTHERAPY IN TREATING MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

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Abstract

Background: People diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis (MS) encounter many symptoms, both physical and mental. Current treatments seemed to slow down progression but do not reverse or improve the disease and its symptoms. There is no known cure for MS.

Materials and Methods: The aim of this study was to review literature, both research, books and courses on hypnotherapy MS and autoimmune disorders, interview hypnotherapists in the field already successful in improving symptoms of MS and then test these techniques on volunteers diagnosed with MS to evaluate the most effective hypnotherapeutic approach. The goal of this study was to design a Multiple Sclerosis Hypnotherapy Program.

There was no control group. The first group of volunteers tracked their own symptoms daily, received 12 sessions in a period of 6 months; the second group also received 12 sessions, tracked their own symptoms daily as well as complete the MS Quality of Life-54 questionnaire in the first and last session. The third group was formed by members of the first and second group that agreed to 6 additional sessions to further test hypnosis techniques as well as integrate the learning from the sessions into their behaviour and life styles.

Results: All three groups experienced improvement in symptoms such as incontinence, fatigue, pain, level of anxiety and depression and an increase in the ability to stand or walk for longer periods of time and walk unassisted. Those that had 18 sessions had the greatest symptoms improvement. These improvements were true for both remitting and progressive forms of MS, recently diagnosed cases and those with more than 35 years of debilitating symptoms.

Conclusion: The results show that the hypnotherapy program designed from this study could reduce both physical and mental symptoms of MS. This study has also led to the conclusion that the most effective hypnotherapy for MS needs to supply the client with means to control and reduce their own symptoms but, for sustained improvements, would need to bring to the client's awareness and then transform the mental patterns specific to people with MS. Treating these patterns appears to have a direct and sustaining effect on their symptoms.

Keywords: multiple sclerosis, MS, hypnotherapy, hypnosis, visual imagery, NLP, anxiety, depression, fatigue, pain, incontinence.

1. INTRODUCTION

Multiple Sclerosis is thought to be an autoimmune disease. This means that cells of the immune system, which normally attack bacteria, viruses, etc, attack part of the body. When the disease is active, parts of the immune system, mainly the T cells, attack the myelin sheath, which surrounds the nerve fibres in the brain and spinal cord. This leads to small patches of inflammation. The inflammation around the myelin sheath stops the affected nerve fibres from working properly, and symptoms develop. When the inflammation clears, the myelin sheath may heal and repair, and nerve fibres start to work again. However, the inflammation, or repeated bouts of inflammation, can leave a small scar (sclerosis), which is thought to permanently damage nerve fibres.

There are relapsing/remitting types of MS and progressive types. The course is unpredictable. Researchers have not found why the immune system attacks the myelin sheaths of the central nervous system or what determines its progression. Additionally there appears to be no correlations between the amount of lesions and the amount and intensity of symptoms.

Symptoms vary a great deal from one person to another – no two people have the same combination of symptoms or same speed of progression. MS can affect a person physically, such as walking difficulty, numbness and tingling, fatigue, pain, bladder dysfunction, or muscle spasm to name a few, and mentally, such as anxiety, cognitive dysfunction, and depression.

At present, there is no cure for MS. Treatment and medication focuses on easing certain symptoms