



Fast-tracking recovery

Some counselors contend that medical hypnoanalysis offers a quicker “cure” for deep emotional problems caused by trauma

By B. Lou Guckian

What if the millions of children and adults who struggle with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or past sexual abuse could be rid of the immobilizing anxieties associated with these or other traumas and phobias in only a few weeks or months?

An alternative cure, medical hypnoanalysis (MH), has been available since the 1970s, but many psychotherapists and other licensed mental health professionals are either unaware of it or untrained in the approach. Despite its obscurity, cases of successful MH treatments are increasing and proving to accomplish in only a few sessions what traditional psychotherapy can take years to achieve.

MH is brief psychotherapy done under hypnosis to quickly get to the subconscious, where unconscious conflicts hide. Compared with traditional talk therapy, which typically requires several months to a lifetime of consistently applied psychotherapy to be effective, MH can help transform a client with anxiety-causing emotional disorders in relatively few sessions when administered by a certified therapist.

What further distinguishes MH from traditional therapy is that it was begun by a medical doctor and its model is formatted after a medical model. MH begins with assessing a client’s case history and is followed by testing, diagnosis and treatment.

“This type of hypnosis is unique,” says Don Hardy-Holley, a licensed professional counselor, licensed marriage and family therapist and national certified counselor. Hardy-Holley, current chair of the board of the American Academy of Medical Hypnoanalysts (AAMH) and a certified MH training analyst, admits to being skeptical at first.

“When we got our first brochure about an AAMH conference in 1995, we thought, why go? What are we going to learn about hypnosis? My wife, Anne, and I had been doing [hypnosis] for years,” he recalls. “But we went, and we found out this is a unique approach. It is psychotherapy in an altered state versus hypnosis only. Hypnoanalysis allows therapists to guide patients, using regression techniques that take them back in time, to causes of trauma. Then we can neutralize the trauma while the patient is in the altered state.”

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, 26 percent of Americans — approximately 58 million people — live with the burden of a mental disorder (or multiple forms of mental disorders) each year. About 8 million of these individuals have PTSD, which can occur at any age and is often caused by accidents. PTSD diagnoses show an upward trend, yet many cases go undiagnosed and untreated.

In a May 27, 2008, news item on *The Huffington Post*, it was reported that military cases of PTSD jumped 50

percent in 2007. The report went on to explain that although 40,000 troops had been diagnosed with the illness since 2003, Army Surgeon General Eric Schoomaker acknowledged that government records might be incomplete, meaning the actual number of PTSD cases could be much higher.

Some psychotherapists, licensed counselors and medical doctors contend that MH is a swifter curative treatment for individuals who have trauma-induced emotional and mental disorders. Among the client groups this approach may benefit most are soldiers returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan with PTSD and individuals dealing with high levels of anxiety after being involved in automobile accidents.

Case study: Michael

In April 2009, AAMH hosted a Brief Therapy With Hypnosis Conference at the Concept Therapy Institute in San Antonio. Over the course of the weekend, from Friday morning to Sunday afternoon, a 40-year-old volunteer patient named Michael received treatment administered by a certified MH training analyst while being observed by approximately 40 conference attendees.

Michael was a U.S. Army veteran who had served in the Middle East during Operation Desert Storm and was subsequently diagnosed with PTSD. He had experienced war, separation from his wife and daughters, loss of his home and relocation to another state. He had lost two businesses, was recovering from alcoholism and drug addiction and had experienced the deaths of his father, some lifelong friends and several fellow soldiers. He had survived multiple car crashes and an arrest for drunk driving. In addition, Michael was living with the trauma of childhood sexual abuse and the emotional remains of growing up in an alcoholic and broken home.

By the time he arrived at the conference, Michael had begun embracing the beginnings of recovery. He was eating nutritionally, had recently stopped smoking, was praying and exercising daily, was attending Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meetings and working with a sponsor, and had begun group therapy for PTSD through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Even so, the psychological and medical professionals attending the conference described Michael's

appearance and responses on Friday in clinically depressing terms: "morose and downtrodden," "exhibiting Walking Zombie syndrome," "restricted," "in denial," "detached" and "appearing shift and 'up to something.'"

By Sunday afternoon, however, after only nine MH sessions and despite an intimidating workshop atmosphere, Michael expressed emotion and laughed. He appeared to the attendees to walk taller and with a more confident gait. The LPCs, psychologists and medical doctors attending the conference were astonished to witness Michael's marked improvement in both affect and attitude.

The swiftness of the therapy's results with Michael exemplifies what sets MH apart from conventional psychotherapy. "In general and including significant personal relationships, many people maintain a vast emotional separation with others and within themselves," says John A. Scott Jr., a psychologist in Colorado who has a doctorate in psychology and counseling and has been practicing MH for more than 30 years. His father, John A. Scott Sr., cofounded AAMH and penned the MH "bible," *The Handbook of Brief Psychotherapy by Hypnoanalysis*.

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“What often keeps us therapists from quicker contact with our clients is what keeps all of us separated as humans: defense mechanisms,” says Scott Jr., who wrote *The Little Book of Wisdom: Ten Steps for Healing and Personal Growth*. “MH dissolves this problem by talking to the subconscious mind during hypnosis, thereby bypassing the client’s conscious defenses.”

Michael attributes the near-instant changes he experienced to MH. “The effect of the barrage of nine hypnoanalysis sessions over the weekend was immediate,” he says. “At the start, I felt like I was moving furniture around in my head. At the end of three days, I had completely rearranged all the furniture.”

In addition, Michael learned meditation and self-hypnosis techniques that quickly became tools he could use at will. “I discovered that meditation is different than prayer; it allows me to comfort both the child in me and the adult, and I can bring them together,” he says. “I’ve also learned that I can adjust my state of mind and that my mind is not my circumstance. I am a good person, but I’ve had some sick circumstances in life.”

Impressive results

“A significant measure of the success of MH for Michael is that he now is able to recognize and neutralize anxiety-causing triggers,” Hardy-Holley says. “When approaching an intersection, for example, Michael suddenly feels like he is in a war zone and begins looking around for bombs. It is not a flashback; it is a feeling of danger. As a result of MH, he recognizes intersections as a trigger, and through this awareness is less likely to feel the fear, or at least the extent of the fear.”

The therapy calmed Michael’s PTSD symptoms. “PTSD is a guarded condition,” Michael says. “When the average person enters a room, that’s all they see. But a vet with PTSD looks around the room for a way out. Much of the time, we are on ‘high idle’ awaiting signs of trouble. So I was surprised that by Sunday, I felt more conscious, more relaxed and less hesitant.”

Michael says he especially benefited from the age regressions, though they were difficult to get through. During age regressions, the client is guided back in time to earlier experiences, including

those that took place during infancy and childhood. These experiences may be significant causes of anxiety in adulthood. “[Age regression] is a tool I began using immediately,” he says. “But remembering caused me to feel sad. I could see the light at the end of the tunnel, but I was still pretty upset about what I discovered. Thoughts came up that I had buried. These are things I am discussing with Don [Hardy-Holley] in follow-up sessions.”

“What I liked best were the meditation techniques and talking to and consoling myself. Now, anytime I want, I can go back and talk to myself as a child at various ages, and I can see that what I thought as insurmountable in my past is something I can overcome today.”

Five months later, with only 12 additional sessions of treatment after the workshop, Hardy-Holley reported that Michael’s PTSD symptoms were nearly gone. “Before therapy, Michael was lost,” Hardy-Holley says. “He literally was barely holding it together and showed no emotion whatsoever. He is expressing more emotions now and being honest with himself, his AA sponsor, his family and me. He has stayed in AA and group therapy with the VA and completed a class at the Concept Therapy Institute to build self-worth.”

Michael recently changed jobs to pursue a better sales opportunity and, at this writing, had closed his first big sale. “Michael looks good and is motivated,” Hardy-Holley says. “Making it a priority to participate in various self-improvement therapies despite earning his living as a commissioned salesperson demonstrates his willingness to improve.”

Michael experienced a surge of optimism after his first nine sessions of MH. “My headaches are gone. I’m still a little sensitive, but that is settling down,” he says. “And I feel optimistic, hopeful. My AA recovery, PTSD group therapy, talking with Don, exercise and working are all things I am doing that contribute to my getting well. I have discovered that the power of our minds can keep us from going to get help or accepting help when we do ask for it. So ask for help. Be open. And have some faith.”

Healing through the subconscious

Past traumas are at the root of most anxiety, Hardy-Holley says. With MH, the therapist explains the causes of and remedies for trauma-induced anxieties to the subconscious mind of the client during hypnoanalysis, typically resulting in instant awareness. In combination with meditation techniques that are part of the MH process, this knowledge or wakefulness helps clients to neutralize their anxiety quickly.

One important awareness-evoking strategy during MH sessions is pointing to the specific events that produced the client’s trauma. For example, “Don’t just refer to ‘action’ during therapy with a vet,” says Thomas Burkig, an LPC and certified hypnotherapist who served three tours of duty in Vietnam and recently attained his board certification from AAMH. “Be specific in your questioning. Ask about a rising mountain of fire, a sky filling with smoke or dead bodies. Associate [clients] with what they have seen and experienced.”

ACA member Mary Kullman, a licensed clinical professional counselor in Chicago and an MH training analyst, served as Michael’s therapist throughout the nine sessions at the 2009 conference. “Some soldiers die mortally and some die spiritually,” Kullman says in describing the emotional effect that exposure to war and death can have on military personnel. “Over the weekend, we witnessed Michael coming back from a spiritual death.” Following the weekend of introductory treatment, Kullman turned Michael’s care over to Hardy-Holley.

To get certified, MH therapists must undergo the treatment themselves. Burkig calls MH “very powerful” and says he was less intense and angry after undergoing hypnoanalysis. “In general, I am calmer,” says Burkig, who uses MH to treat behavioral issues, including anger, depression, addiction and borderline personality disorder, in residents of Avalon Center, a residential treatment facility for young women in Eddy, Texas, where he is executive director.

Wide range of applications

Dr. Vickie Yorke has practiced family medicine for 23 years. Attending the AAMH conference convinced her that hypnoanalysis could be applied to

her patients' health problems. "Given its value to medicine, I was surprised that more medical doctors were not in attendance," Yorke says. "We will combine the therapy with an effective medication to help my smoking patients quit and include it with a weight-loss program for our overweight patients."

Hardy-Holley says applications for MH abound, including for phobias and many other forms of trauma-induced anxiety. He recalls one client who was promoted to a prestigious office on the 26th floor of a high-rise building encased by windows. The windows created so much anxiety for the man that he couldn't peer through them. "He said it wasn't the fall he feared but landing that scared him," Hardy-Holley says.

After undergoing four sessions of MH, the man no longer felt afraid to look out the windows. "In other words, he was cured," Hardy-Holley says. "But it wasn't just a 'cure.' It was an awareness the patient didn't have prior to hypnoanalysis. During regression, we uncovered an incident that had occurred beyond his conscious memory. His older sister had accidentally tipped over his baby carriage when he was an infant and he had fallen, face down."

Auto accidents are a common source of trauma-induced anxiety, Hardy-Holley says. One case involved a young mother who was driving a minivan in the rain when another car hit the vehicle head-on. Although her children were fine, the mother was injured. The paramedics carried her away, separating her from her children, which left her traumatized.

"Following the accident, she could not drive in the rain without feeling anxious," Hardy-Holley says. "After four sessions of MH, she stopped experiencing

anxiety and could drive in the rain. She may always remember the accident, but the memory no longer causes her to feel anxious."

"Without the benefit of MH to unbury and treat traumas, the quality of life is limited for countless people, and they don't even know it can be fixed," he says. "Our challenge as therapists is to spread the word about the long-term and extensive benefits of brief hypnoanalysis."

Potential cases for MH can run the range from mild to extreme. For example, one of Scott Jr.'s clients was fondled by his father as a child. In adulthood, the man felt inadequate in love relationships. Otherwise, he was healthy and high functioning, with no alcohol or drug use and no legal, health or money problems. "The fondling had robbed his sense of masculinity," Scott Jr. explains. "After MH treatment and only a few follow-up sessions of talk therapy, the man realized he deserved love, began dating and eventually got married."

A more extreme case was a client who received treatment for two years for borderline personality disorder. Such cases involve individuals who never attached to a caregiver in early childhood, typically because the caregiver was unreliable or selfish. "He was on the border of total mental collapse," Scott Jr. says. "He was close to being psychotic and perceived authority figures as either godlike or satanic. If he dated someone, he held them to a perfectionist standard given his irrational good-bad perspective. He was at constant risk for suicide. Cases like this can be stabilized with MH but likely are destined for a lifetime of therapy."

AAMH (aamh.com) is the first and only training organization for MH. Since 1974, AAMH has provided a

multidisciplinary approach to hypnosis training for professional practitioners, including licensed counselors, marriage and family therapists, ministers, physicians, psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers. It also provides a national network of training analysts who teach professionals to integrate MH into their practices. According to AAMH, hypnosis alone is clearly distinguished from MH.

William Bryan Jr., a doctor of medicine who also had a doctorate of jurisprudence, discovered MH in the 1950s. In the 1970s, he trained Scott Sr. and Scott Jr. in the technique, which they began applying in their independent therapy practices. Scott Jr. has since participated in more than 40 training conferences for MH.

"While traditional hypnosis is successful in helping people alter some behaviors such as stopping smoking or controlling their weight, MH is an in-depth training model that uses a structured process," Scott Jr. says. "This process guides therapists' use with hypnosis to effect therapeutic self-discovery, transformation and healing." ♦

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