**Healing Power of Mind Body Hypnosis**

2022 AHNS Cancer Prevention Service Community Service Awards

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**Background and Aims:**

A cancer diagnosis comes with significant distress and quality of life changes. Head and neck cancer patients are no exception, suffering from significant pain and anguish ranging from xerostomia, anxiety, depression, surgery disfigurement, and post radiation fibrosis resulting in dysphagia and decreased quality of life. Hypnosis is one of the most frequently cited forms of non-pharmacologic cognitive pain control therapy now growing in use in cancer care. Clinical hypnosis has been defined as a mind-body therapy that involves a deeply relaxed state, individualized mental imagery, and therapeutic suggestion.

The basis of hypnotherapy comes with an understanding that thoughts and emotions contribute to the severity of a disease. If a patient is generating negative thoughts and emotions, this can directly affect the physical body that can then worsen the negative thoughts and emotions. If this sequence of events is triggered repeatedly, it can put the patient is a state of “dis-ease.” Hypnosis believes that the mind has two components: the conscious and the subconscious. The conscious mind is used for logic, analyzation, and decision making. Meanwhile, the subconscious mind makes up a larger portion of the mind and is analogous to a hard drive containing instinctual information for memories and survival. Through mind body hypnosis, the power of the mind is utilized to heal the body with hypnosis acting as a bridge between the two. Through clinical hypnosis sessions, an altered state of awareness and heightened focus is developed in the patient which allows access to the subconscious mind. Once the subconscious is accessed in a clinical setting, positive suggestions are given to the patient to help them manage negative thoughts and emotions.

Our goal: to utilize the Mind-Body Hypnosis protocol to improve swallowing function and overall quality of life after completing chemotherapy, radiation, and surgery. Furthermore, there are three main aims of our study:

Aim 1: To determine the feasibility and validity of mind body hypnosis as a suitable intervention for head and neck cancer survivors.

Aim 2: The aim is to understand the effect of once daily hypnosis therapy on dysphagia severity over an eight-week treatment period.

Aim 3: This study seeks to understand the necessary dosage of hypnosis therapy to influence various prevalent symptoms including mood, pain, self-image, smoking behavior, taste sensation, in head and neck cancer survivors.

**Population:**

Stage I-III head and neck cancer survivors aged 20-80 who have completed therapy in the last three years. Patients with dysphagia and/or a tracheostomy are included. All patients must have smart phone and Wi-Fi capabilities.

**Methods:**

Recruited patients will be randomly assigned to two groups:

Group 1- listen to dysphagia audio daily for 8 weeks.

Group 2- will rank their top 4 symptoms (mood, pain, self-image, difficulty swallowing) from most to least bothersome and listen to 2 weeks of hypnosis audio for each symptom, totaling 8 weeks.

All patients will access hypnotherapy sessions through an application called Thinkific. This app can also send reminders to patients to complete their session as well as allow researchers to see how often the patient is accessing the recordings.

Pre-surveys will be given to all patients from both groups before hypnotherapy begins. All patients will also complete once weekly surveys. Final post-surveys will be given at week 12 (one month following the last hypnotherapy session) to assess for sustainability of effects of hypnosis. Some of the questionnaires to be administered included: MD Anderson Dysphagia Inventory (MDADI), PROMIS Pain Interference questionnaire, NIH General Life Satisfaction form, HDQLIFE Swallowing Difficulties, among many others that further quantify quality of life and general health.

**Expected Outcomes:**

We hope to find that our patients have a statistically significant reduction in their dysphagia as well as a significant increase in quality of life. Research has shown that two weeks of hypnosis therapy is sufficient for a significant impact so we hope that all patients are able to complete at least two weeks of hypnosis therapy to be considered as completing the study.

**Expected Impact on Community Health/Knowledge:**

We hope this initial data will help quantify the number of hypnosis sessions needed to make a significant impact on a patient’s condition. Specifically, we look forward to understanding the role of hypnosis in preventing adverse reactions to common cancer therapeutics such as radiation and chemotherapy. Furthermore, by identifying hypnotherapy as a therapeutic tool, future cancer patients can utilize it to improve quality of life and post-treatment sequalae.

In conclusion, hypnosis is a mind-body connecting tool that harnesses the power of mind. Through use of daily hypnosis recordings, patients can improve quality of life and side effects from cancer therapies. Further research into hypnosis will emphasize the mind’s contribution towards healing in cancer care.

**Funding:**

We hope to use this funding to support our online Thinkific platform and provide patients with headphones to improve their listening experience while doing their hypnosis therapy.