

Hypnosis and the Medical Mystique

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The mystique, which surrounds the nature and practice of medicine, belies truthfulness in a way that reflects the vulgarity and ignorance of contemporary civilization. Indeed, the precision and accuracy with which a given society uses their linguistic intellect clearly demonstrates their stage of development. Unfortunately, how we address terms related to medicine and its practice too often involves pecuniary turf conflicts rather than focusing on the intended benefit to humanity. The role of hypnotherapy in medicine is but one example.

The word medicine is so vague such that it encompasses several and various types of endeavors. It literally refers to any scientific enterprise involved with diagnosing, treating, and preventing disease and any other damage to the body or mind. As such, it includes two basic components: science and healing. While not all activities involving scientific methodologies are meant to entail healing, likewise not all healing methodologies can be classified as being scientific. This means that there are entire classes of healing activities – such as many of those referred to as traditional medicine – that are actually not medical in nature. Nevertheless, a preponderance of recent literature clearly shows that hypnotherapy is both firmly based in science and frequently results in healing the body and mind. Therefore, it deserves a place within medical dialogue.

Those areas that have frequently been classified as being medical can be segregated into two groups. Generally, the dividing line is associated with the advent of scientific methodology. Prior arts – such as Ayurveda, Siddha, traditional Chinese medicine, acupuncture, and traditional African medicine – are often described as pre-scientific. Scientific medicine includes hypnotherapeutic, naturopathic, homeopathic, chiropractic, and practices that have been frequently misidentified as being modern – and which can be labeled as allopathic. Please note that medicine most certainly is not limited to just one approach.

So, as medicine apparently comes in various forms and flavors, how does a society determine who is rightly involved in its practice? The problem is that the definition of medicine is sufficiently vague and encompasses a much wider range of practitioners beyond the fully licensed MD. Indeed, anyone who adheres to scientific protocols and is in anyway engaged in addressing diseases or damage could be truthfully considered as practicing some version of medicine. Therefore, if that person's activities should also include any scientifically based efforts to discover (diagnose), correct (treat), or preclude an occurrence (prevent), presumptively they could be declared to be practicing medicine. Yes, a hypnotherapist, who helps someone with their smoking or weight issues and teaches self-hypnosis, could therefore be appropriately considered by definition to be a medical practitioner. (For example, smoking tobacco products and many mild eating habits represent abnormal, harmful, depraved, or morbid conditions. Therefore, they can be correctly classified as diseases – regarding which most clinical hypnotherapists are fully competent when it comes to diagnosis, treatment, and promoting prevention.) I fully realize that this observation will make many within the medical professions – and even most hypnotherapists – rather uncomfortable despite the fact that it is entirely correct.

The danger here is that the current definition of medicine is too vague. This presents a tremendous dilemma as numerous valid practitioners run the risk of criminal prosecution should they get

accused of the unauthorized practice of medicine. Various mental health laws seem to protect psychologists, counselors, and other therapists. However, as there is an increasing realization concerning the validity of the mind/body connection and as mental health practitioners are much more qualified in this area than their most physiologically oriented colleagues, there is an increasing probability that they too can at times be accused of inappropriately crossing an arbitrary line. Again, this is despite the fact that they are much more suited to handling the mental component of any physiological problem.

Nevertheless, this leaves almost all of the alternative health care practitioners at a much higher risk level. Most naturopathic, homeopathic, and hypnotherapeutic practitioners almost always end up operating with little or no legal sanctions. While many states lack laws in this regard, others restrict what practitioners call themselves and at least one forces them to require that prospective patients sign a disclosure statement, which pretty much declares the practitioner's lack of competence. In that case, a hypnotherapist must openly admit that he or she is not a licensed (allopathic) medical doctor even though there is absolutely no desire to claim otherwise. Hypocritically, licensed allopathic medical doctors are not required to inform a prospective patient with whom they wish to employ a hypnotherapeutic technique that they are not trained hypnotherapists – and therefore the patient runs the risk that the doctor's suggestions (e.g. in the case of a harmful placebo) may in fact be contrary to their health.

The legal treatment of alternative health care practitioners – who are literally just as much involved with the practice of medicine as sanctioned practitioners – is a weakness in our society. This is despite the fact that the federal government of the United States officially recognizes their existence, a special complementary and alternative medicine component of the National Institutes of Health is funded annually by Congress, and government surveys clearly indicate the preference of many citizens when it comes to the availability of alternative health therapies. However, among practitioners there appears to be somewhat of a reticence when it comes to encouraging clarifying legislation. A clear risk is implied that if pursued, parochial turf concerns may quickly result in the denial of the rights of such practitioners and their patients. Of course, a formal commitment within the field to improve hypnotherapists' credentials would go a long way to strengthening our standing and lowering the risk that we may become officially obsolete.

The solution for many individuals and authorities within the hypnotherapy field has been to avoid the issue by remaining well underneath the radar. Many practitioners are incorrectly encouraged to avoid the use of medical sounding terms such as clinical, patient, diagnosis, treatment, and prevention lest someone motivated by public concern or pecuniary loss protest. Indeed, this is the safe route. However, it results in the denial of public choice and also represents a lack of confidence and courage. Thus it is symbolic of the general need of better standards and an increased professional self-image within the field. The problem is that the recent interest in mind/body integration has significantly affected how many clinicians practice hypnotherapy. A sub-field, which is often called medical hypnosis or medical hypnotherapy – but should be more properly referred to as hypnotherapeutic medicine – has rapidly received increasing interest. In many ways this has been the result of a significant effort within the allopathic medical and licensed psychology professions to investigate the influence of hypnosis on physiology. Positive results, which have been clearly documented in the medical literature and indexed by the federal government, fully justify this trend. The other significant realization is that the best outcomes have been attained by hypnotherapists and others in the mental health field – despite their lack of training in physiology. Additionally, there have been a number of allopathic medical doctors and nurses who have shifted their emphasis when it comes to hypnotherapeutic medical techniques.

While I still believe that financial turf conflicts will continue to hamper the development of practitioner competence and the public awareness of and the demand for hypnotherapeutic medicine,

I readily admit that public safety must always remain paramount. This means that despite legal sanctions to the contrary, medical practitioners – including hypnotherapists – must never diagnose, treat, or give preventive advice for which they are not fully competent. For instance, unless otherwise qualified, the local hypnotherapist should never declare that a patient has fibromyalgia, ADHD, or cancer as their current training – and current laws – do not recognize their diagnostic competence. However, such unethical practices can also extend to those in the licensed allopathic medical and psychology professions. For instance, medical doctors and licensed psychologists should not endeavor to employ hypnosis techniques for which they have received no or inadequate training. Furthermore, while quickie courses of short duration, such as 40 hours or less, may expose students to a handful of relevant hypnotic skills, it would be fraudulent for them to begin implying that they are competently trained hypnotherapists.

The current confusion – to include legality and contemporary practices – regarding the realm of medicine is indicative of the state of our civilization. The lack of precision when it comes to the use of our language is disturbing. Additionally, the insistence on keeping medical practices focused on surgery and pharmacology – thereby ignoring the mental dimension – is equally bothersome as it contradicts much of what has been recently revealed scientifically about physics and energy, as well as the impact of the mind on physical health. I look forward to the day when members of the public and practitioners can fully embrace the multiple facets of healing in a way that is both truly scientific and sufficiently intellectual.

It is important to realize that hypnotherapy has been scientifically proven to be extremely effective for a wide range of medical ailments. In fact, a knowledgeable diagnostician should recognize that hypnosis should be the primary protocol when many diseases are detected. Furthermore, many medical uses of hypnosis, such as hypnoanesthesia are still considered as "investigational" by most allopathically-oriented entities such as insurance companies. This is despite the fact that scientific research, which established the efficacy of that application, predates just about every protocol used in modern medical facilities.

Indeed, hypnotherapeutic medicine is a valid form of medicine, which is long overdue for formal recognition. It is backed up by numerous recent neurological and other scientific mind/body studies. And, despite my concern about the need for increased standardization and improved credentials among my colleagues, there are currently numerous competent practitioners ready and able to provide such services. Now is the time for additional proficient hypnotherapeutic medicine practitioners to become qualified and recognized for the role that they can play in science-based healing in a more civilized society.