
BOOK REVIEW: The Handbook of Contemporary Clinical Hypnosis: Theory and Practice

Edited by Les Brann, Jacky Owens, and Ann Williamson
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As clinicians working with hypnosis, we are challenged to mobilize clinical insights, scientific knowledge, and skills developed by training and experience, and fine-tuning them to the individual needs of clients and patients. We often look for external support from literature, journals, and books, or we feel the need to consult Hypnosis Listserv or our colleagues to find inspiration and scientific evidence for a particular problem or approach. With the publishing of this book, the authors have done a wonderful job for us, as readers, clinicians, and teachers in hypnosis, by bringing together clinical experience, insight, and research data in one accessible volume. As seasoned clinicians they share their own ways of offering help, as they go about it in their daily practice. You will find direct support for your work as you learn about their way of flexibly integrating, adapting, individualizing, and improving hypnotic approaches, all with their personal flavours.

The book is divided into three parts: (1) Hypnosis: The Fundamentals, (2) The Stages of Therapy, and (3) Specific Disorders. There is a basic overall structure, with most of the chapters including research data, scientific insights, approaches to a particular problem, scripts, and case studies. This helps to make the information clear when applying it to practical work with patients.

In Part 1 you learn about the theory behind the therapy. Convincing data demonstrate 'a possible explanation for hypnotic phenomena that the ACC decreases the amount of inhibition of predicted sensations' (p. 13) and that 'highly hypnotizable people are normally strongly left hemisphere focused, but swing to an equally strong right focus when hypnotized' (p. 12). The authors have succeeded in presenting specialized information in an easy-to-process way. Essential when working with hypnosis are knowledge of hypnotic phenomena, concepts of hypnotizability, and the uses of hypnosis at different levels of functioning—from communication, personal development, and anxiety management to altering perception, unconscious processes, and physiology.

The editors respect Einstein's quote that 'imagination is more important than knowledge', so imagery and visualization deserve a special chapter (4). By using imagery to 'take your pain and discomfort and give it a shape by imaging or visualizing the first shape that comes into your mind—the shape may be abstract or concrete' (p. 46), you enter the world of clinical applications. This may stimulate your interest in reading further to discover many different applications.

In Part 2, the chapter on explanations of hypnosis (8) offers the hemispheric specialization model, which is a nice tool to explain how our brains work. It suggests how 'in computer terms it seems that each hemisphere is programmed differently' and how 'in hypnosis we have logged on to the right hemisphere' (p. 98). Newcomers to the area are offered a complete script which they can memorize and reproduce in their own words to explain to their clients how hypnosis works and to allay any fears and myths. More experienced therapists get inspiration or variation for their psycho-educational work.

Similarly, in Chapter 9 on induction and deepening, you find complete scripts, some commonplace, but all spiced up with some new 'accents' showing how hypnosis can be practised in a flexible and up-to-date way. It leaves creativity to therapist—for instance, being integrative when generating a 'mindfulness trance'.

Chapters 14 to 40 guide you in the common applications of hypnosis. To cite just a few, you learn about hypnosis as method to improve self-esteem, treat anxiety and phobias, deal with psychosomatic and medically unexplained symptoms, as well as pain, eating and habit disorders, and how offer help in cancer care, oncology, and obstetrics.

Chapter 15 on anxiety and panic disorder gives, in only 24 pages, a 'complete' overview, covering the neuro-anatomy of emotional disorders and how to integrate hypnosis in anxiety work. A case study offers a lively illustration of the different methods used—from special place imagery and exploration of the pattern, to ego strengthening with the mirror exercise and metaphor of praise as a gift—in six fortnightly sessions of 30 minutes, demonstrating how hypnosis efficiently helped 'Melinda' to overcome her problem.

Recent insights have demonstrated that rumination is a problem in depression. Chapter 16 illustrates how hypnosis is a most useful tool to facilitate experiential thinking by using imagery and an observer position.

Chapter 18 on the often resistant and difficult issue of 'medically unexplained symptoms' offers suggestions for desperate doctors and therapists. It proposes integrating hypnosis in 'seeing the whole picture' (this view is common for all chapters) and explains that 'investigations are being carried out to exclude a problem and done alongside an exploration of the emotional and stress related issues'. The BIG ITCH (Belief, Imprint, Guilt, Identity, Trauma Conflict, Hysteria) offers clear questions and resolutions, illustrated with examples so that clinicians should feel motivated to perform their work with confidence and curiosity about what answers will come up.

On the subject of psychosomatic disorders, in Chapter 19 you will find a comprehensive model of the aetiology of migraine, fibromyalgia, and irritable bowel syndrome with a 'switch', where you learn how hypnosis can be helpful in generating changes.

The chapters on anaesthesia, surgery and invasive procedures (22) and oncology (23) focus rather more on scientific studies and effectiveness with an extensive overview of the research data. The chapter on cancer care (24) shows how patients are diligently guided through the whole process from diagnosis through to pre-treatment, remission, and any recurrence. It states: 'Hypnotherapy and related interventions can play an important part in improving the quality of life of patients at various stages of the cancer journey' (p. 373). I particularly appreciated the specifically adapted ego-strengthening technique offered with the mnemonic KUFAL (Know, Understand, Forgive, Accept, Like, Enjoy the 'me' inside me) (p. 356). Patients are also invited to discover ACE—Acceptance, Confidence, and Emphasis on all that is helpful

and healthy in your life (p. 357). These are just two of numerous well-worked-out approaches; as always, individually tailored to the patient.

That 'pain is always a psychological state' (p. 293) and that 'pain can be considered a disorder in its own right' (p. 294), Chapter 21 underscores the importance of the study of pain mechanisms and treatment. A clear overview of the 'neuromatrix' input and output makes the complex theory easy to understand and explain. What we tell our patients has considerable impact on them: 'Imagery is often a representation of the patient's interpretation of the doctor's explanation' and 'This belief feeds into the pain neuromatrix and enhances its activation' (p. 304). Plenty of the studies mentioned illustrate how hypnosis can act to 'reduce the intensity or the bothersomeness of any pain' (p. 310).

Besides the widespread applications for which hypnosis has proved to be useful, a chapter on death, dying, and loss, a less common subject, illustrates how hypnosis can reduce death anxiety instead of leaving patients alone in their struggle: 'A dying person is losing everyone in their lives at one time. Many people feel as though they are floundering in a void. Voids are frightening places to be in. Many fear the mode of death; there are some for whom "not being" is the more frightening' (p. 378). For them Bernie Siegel's concept of using a white room may come in useful: standing at the door to the room the patient notices that a party is being celebrated beyond the door—a gathering of people being relevant to the patient—and if they wish, they are allowed to open the door and go inside (p. 378).

Chapter 35 on learning disability and autistic spectrum disorders shows some promising results which are 'encouraging' and 'further publications are eagerly awaited' (p. 534).

In Chapter 38 on informal hypnotic techniques, the hypnotic project is defined as a co-operative venture between participants (p. 567) and emphasizes the most fundamental of all hypnotic phenomena: relationships. Our choice of words and citations gently helps our patients to shift to a state in which the mind is more receptive. These techniques open a door to applications in a wider medical community which can improve patients' comfort in all kinds of medical and dental settings.

The book is a really modern, up-to-date version of Hypnosis Anno 2012, with computer metaphors, software, star wars and mindfulness trance, to name just a few strategies. I recommend it as a basic book for students and professionals working with hypnosis in medicine and psychotherapy. Even if you are experienced you will find new ideas, inspiration, and support for your work plus research data and much more besides. It is a book that deserves a special place on your bookshelf, or maybe on your desk, to use as a hands-on reference guide for daily use in your clinical work. The editors have succeeded in interweaving a thread through the work by using plenty of cross-references to other chapters which cover similar topics, methods, or techniques, although each chapter can be read on its own.

The book offers good value as this one book could replace many other volumes. It is an inspiring compilation appropriate for students, professional practitioners, and teachers in the field of hypnosis in medical and psycho-therapeutic practice. I am grateful to all the authors and editors who have created such a tremendous work.