

## Hypnosis as Good as Counseling in Helping Smokers Quit, Study Finds

By Steve Tokar

**Hypnosis is as effective as standard behavioral counseling in helping smokers quit and stay off cigarettes for one year**, according to a study by researchers at the San Francisco VA Medical Center.

Among smokers who reported a history of depression, hypnosis was significantly more effective than counseling in the study, reports lead author Timothy P. Carmody, PhD, a senior researcher in mental health at SFVAMC and a clinical professor of psychiatry at the University of California, San Francisco.

"Hypnosis is a very popular intervention for people who are trying to quit smoking," notes Carmody. "However, until now, there has not been enough scientific evidence to validate hypnosis as an approach. This study was designed to provide such evidence." **The study appears in the May 2008 issue of *Nicotine & Tobacco Research*, Volume 10, Issue 5, pages 811 – 818.**



Of the 246 men and women smokers who completed the study, 125 were randomly assigned to hypnosis and the remaining 121 were assigned to behavioral counseling, a standard smoking cessation treatment. As a part of intake assessment at the beginning of the study, each subject answered the question, "Do you have a history of depression?"

After one year, 22 percent of the hypnosis subjects had successfully abstained from cigarettes for one year. Among the counseled subjects, 15 percent had successfully abstained. Statistically, the results are considered comparable.

Among subjects who reported a history of depression, hypnosis was significantly more effective: 27 percent versus 16 percent for those who had received behavioral counseling.

"This is an important finding," says Carmody. "It is evidence that **hypnosis is at least as effective as standard counseling**. However, we don't know why hypnosis appears to be more effective among the smokers who answered 'yes' to a single question about depression." Carmody notes that there are various types and severities of depression, and recurring depression versus single episodes. "In future studies," he says, "we need to fine-tune the question and hopefully discover the meaning of these results."

Ultimately, says Carmody, the goal is to discover "for which types of smokers hypnosis can be most effective."

Co-authors of the study are Carol Duncan, RD, MPH, Joel A. Simon, MD, MPH, Sharon Solkowitz, MPH, Joy Huggins, MA, Sharon Lee, BA, and Kevin Delucchi, PhD, of SFVAMC and UCSF.

The study was funded by the California Tobacco-Related Disease Research Program. SFVAMC has the largest medical research program in the national VA system, with more than 200 research scientists, all of whom are faculty members at UCSF.