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Hypnosis could help with abortion pain

By Amy Norton

NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - Hypnosis could offer an additional way to ease pain in women having an early-pregnancy abortion, a new study suggests.

The study, of 350 women who had a first-trimester abortion at a single clinic, found that patients given hypnotherapy right before the procedure needed less pain medication during it. And afterward, they were in no more pain than women who'd received standard care alone.

Such drugs do partially relieve pain during abortion, but there are good reasons to reduce women's need for them, according to Dr. Isabelle Marc, the lead researcher on the study.

In general, less medication means a shorter recovery, fewer side effects and a quicker discharge, Marc, of Laval University in Quebec, Canada, told Reuters Health.

"Pain management during abortion remains a challenge," she said, and the current findings suggest that so-called hypnotic analgesia might help in relieving women's pain and anxiety during the procedure.

Marc and her colleagues report the findings in the *American Journal of Obstetrics & Gynecology*.

During hypnotherapy, patients are aided in getting into a relaxed state of consciousness, and then given suggestions for ways to manage symptoms or change their behavior.

In this study, half of the women were randomly assigned to have a hypnotic relaxation session where they were offered ways to deal with their pain during the abortion. The hypnotherapist then remained with them during the procedure.

The rest of the patients received standard care; a nurse specialist stayed with them during the procedure and gave advice on relaxing and deep breathing, but offered no specific instructions on decreasing pain or anxiety.

Overall, Marc's team found, 63 percent of women in the hypnotherapy group ended up requesting IV pain medication during the procedure, compared with 85 percent in the standard-care group.

Other studies have shown that hypnotic analgesia can affect nervous system activity in a way that dampens the physiological response to pain, Marc noted.

"There is now considerable physiological evidence in support of the use of hypnosis to reduce pain," she said.

"The results of this study," she added, "strongly support the conduct of a larger study to confirm that hypnosis can be at large offered to patient without risk, better care satisfaction and recovery during stressful gynecological procedures."

SOURCE: *American Journal of Obstetrics & Gynecology*, November 2008.



Isabelle Marc, Pierre Rainville, Benoît Masse, René Verreault, Lucie Vaillancourt, Estelle Vallée, Sylvie Dodin. (Nov 2008). Hypnotic analgesia intervention during first-trimester pregnancy termination: an open randomized trial. *American Journal of Obstetrics & Gynecology*.