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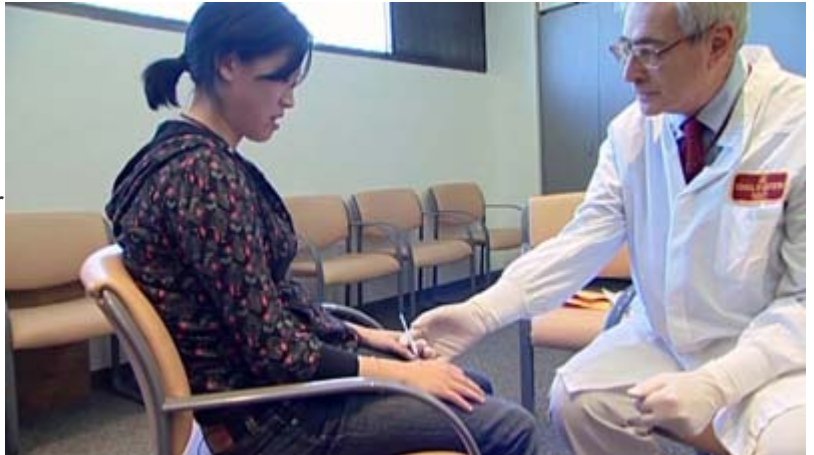
Dentistry Without Needles

USC School Of Dentistry Teaches Hypnosis As An Alternative To Needles And Novocain

By Angelica Urquijo

What if it was possible to undergo a root canal filling or tooth extraction without feeling the pinch of a needle or the after effects of general anesthesia? Hypnosis could uncover a new world for patients seeking dental care.

The soothing voice of your dentist could transport you into a state of mind that allows the dental professional to complete a procedure simple cleaning or a complex procedure that involves oral surgery slip into a state of relaxation.



"Now as I count from one to 10, I can feel myself sinking more and more deeply into the quiet, relaxed, enjoyable feeling. More relaxed with each count."

Wendy J.N. Lee listens to the words uttered by associate professor Peter Stone, D.D.S., as her body slips into a more comfortable position during a recent visit to the USC School of Dentistry. Lee, a USC cinema graduate student, filmed Stone's hypnosis techniques for Say Aah, a documentary about her fear of dentistry.

Hypnosis in dentistry was first reported in Egypt more than 3,000 years ago. The demise of its practice occurred with Horace Wells in the 19th century, who initiated the use of nitrous oxide and ether during procedures.

In the years that followed, chemicals and general anesthesia became common practice, and hypnosis became a sleepy alternative to sedation.

Today, the USC School of Dentistry is the only dental school in the United States that offers formal training for dental professionals in the use of hypnosis.

Stone, who works in the division of health promotion, disease prevention and epidemiology, teaches "Modern Hypnosis for the 21st Century Dentist." He has taught the techniques and applications of hypnosis since 1981 for the Southern California Society of Clinical Hypnosis.

"The time spent learning hypnosis not only makes a visit to the dentist more pleasant for the patient, but it also enhances a practitioner's productivity, providing a stress-free environment for all," he says.

"Working with nervous patients makes it difficult to carry out our job," Stone explains. "Dentists by nature, we don't like to hurt people – we're trained to bring them relief from pain. When a patient is relaxed and calm, the procedure goes more smoothly and more quickly."

Hypnosis could be a win-win for both patient and dentist. It's a less expensive alternative to general or conscious sedation, which can cost hundreds of dollars.

"In the average patient, we can teach them to relax and control their fears 90 percent of the time. In a small group of patients, hypnosis allows them to control pain, bleeding or salivation during a procedure or speed up recovery time," Stone says.

Stone shares his experience with one patient during oral surgery: "I remember telling my assistant, 'If only John would stop bleeding, I could finish this procedure quicker and remove the root tip causing his pain.' Instantly my patient stopped bleeding."

The technique is also used to control gagging, bruxism (teeth grinding and clenching) or breathing problems. In addition, hypnosis can enhance memory of a pleasant visit to the dentist.

Each year, dentists from across the country and Canada travel to Los Angeles for the two-day hypnosis course taught by Stone at the USC School of Dentistry. The workshop provides dentists with the tools and skills they need to use hypnosis comfortably in their dental practice.

By Monday morning, these dentists are equipped with the knowledge they need to put their patients at ease.

Hala Al-Tarifi, a South Pasadena dentist, shares her experience: "I started implementing hypnosis in my office, and one of my patients slept through a crown prep."