



## Unblocking the mind

By : Suzanna Pillay

**Sexual dysfunction can be helped through hypnotherapy. SUZANNA PILLAY speaks to a clinical hypnotherapist on the common sex-related problems faced by men and women today.**



Menon (right) conducts hypnotherapy on a male subject.

SEXUAL problems can undermine self-esteem, relationships and the identity of femininity and masculinity in sufferers.

They have a massive impact on a patient's inclination or ability to have sex and can be traced either to organic (physiological) sexual problems which require medical intervention, or caused by psychological issues.

In the latter, hypnotherapy can help all psychosexual dysfunction and disorders where there is a psychological origin for the disorder.

Hypnosis is a state of mind connected to deep relaxation, narrowed focus and increased suggestibility. Hypnotherapy does the therapy inside this experience and is an effective approach to dealing with behavioural and anxiety-based conditions.

"How hypnotherapy works is that it helps remove the conscious interference that would inhibit the therapeutic process. Hypnosis also increases our sense of optimism and well-being by reducing our anxiety levels, building confidence and mentally rehearsing successful outcomes which are useful in dealing with psychosexual disorders, where a negative conditioned response to sexual activity exists," said Sheila Menon, a Clinical Hypnotherapist with Hypnosis and Training Solutions Sdn Bhd.

Menon said psycho-sexual disorders often result from anxiety about sexual activity (performance anxiety or phobia), trauma or past experience affecting the present (sexual abuse/rape), stress (work, family and financial stress) and restrictive beliefs about sex.

They can also stem from early-learned behaviours, for instance, sexual behaviour learned in the formative years of sexual activity like adolescence, which can become ingrained and result in dysfunction in adulthood.

“Hypnotherapy helps patients recondition their sexual response by reducing anxiety about the sexual activity and reconditioning their sexual responses by removing negative preconditioned, pre-learned behaviour,” she said.

“Common sexual dysfunction today, in the case of women, involves vaginismus (clamping down of vaginal muscles) and frigidity. With men, we often see erectile dysfunction, or premature ejaculation in younger men. With both men and women there can be a loss of sex drive/desire or anorgasmia (the inability to have orgasms).”

Hypnosis, she said, created distance and objectivity so that it becomes safe to explore difficult, stressful issues especially important in cases like trauma which allows the patient to explore problems safely.

“A patient can relive a bad experience in the past which he/she experienced as a child and review that incident with ‘fresh eyes’ today.

“When someone is in trauma, a disassociation takes place and when there is repeated trauma that disassociation is maintained by the brain’s mechanism to protect. It can become very difficult for them to let go of this and when they don’t, energy goes towards maintaining that defence. It is when people don’t challenge their feelings they can go through a whole range of sexual dysfunctional problems,” she said.

In the case of children who are sexually abused, the issue becomes more difficult.

“Children can very easily disassociate. Sometimes they can lock away traumatic incidents and not really challenge them if the abuse stops. Sometimes this extends to adulthood, where there is a huge amount of defence mechanism that’s set up ready to protect them. Quite often, abused children can be abusive, traumatised or dysfunctional.”

Sometimes, Menon says, faulty belief systems can contribute to sexual dysfunction. She cites an example of a patient who had a fear of penetration who traced the cause to a childhood incident when she was regressed during hypnotherapy.

“She had been given a new bicycle as a child which she enjoyed riding until an incident where unaware that the seat had come off, she came down heavily on the protruding bar.”

Menon said faulty beliefs about sex sometimes come to us from parents who want to keep us safe, teachers or well-intentioned people who share knowledge from their own time which may not be appropriate today, or which we have misunderstood.

In the case of people who have gone through a bad relationship, people who are scared, nervous or inexperienced, hypnotherapy also helps.

“Pseudo-orientation or age progression as it is also known, gets them to imagine themselves in positive sexual situations where new templates for positive and fulfilling sexual activity are created in their unconscious that will lead to it being reflected in their behavioural and emotional reactions to sex.”