

# **Nurses and Hypnosis: A Perfect Match**

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When many people think of the word “hypnosis”, images of older men with goatees, funny accents and pocket watches may come to mind. Nothing could be further from the truth. In the twenty-first century, hypnosis is coming into a new light of understanding. In the very early days of its use, the prestige factor was overly emphasized and it was believed that only men could induce hypnosis. In fact, many doctors who would learn hypnosis to help others would not allow themselves to be hypnotized. It seems that male pride and professional hubris made it impossible for many doctors in the 1950’s and 1960’s to personally experience the wonders of hypnosis. In those days, hypnotists would use nurses as subjects while the doctors watched. Today, two of the major hypnosis organizations training health professionals in the therapeutic use of hypnosis are women.

What is hypnosis and why are nurses so ideally suited to use it? Hypnosis can be simply defined as a focused state of attention. While a person is in that wonderful relaxed state they are given beneficial suggestions that aid the healing process. No one is completely sure why it works but the consensus is that by bypassing the conscious mind positive suggestions that could be ignored during the normal waking state are more readily accepted. Words have healing power and even when patients are under anesthesia are able to hear on a certain level. Hypnosis just involves speaking, something nurses already do, formal training helps them use their words more precisely to bring about desired results with patients. Due to the factors brought about by managed care, doctors must see many patients in the course of a day, spending only a few minutes with each. Increasingly, it is the nurse who has the greatest opportunity to connect with the patients.

Although nurses have many responsibilities making their rounds, patients seek them out asking them questions and opening up about feelings, fears and concerns. This is true of those who may have long or short-term hospital stays. The experienced nurse has the confidence born of the training and technical knowledge to gain the trust of the patient.

Trust equals relaxation and acceptance of suggestions in hypnosis. The majority of nurses are female and many patients view them as a mother substitutes. Many patients’ early experience with being sick involves a mother dispensing comfort and aspirins. Often patients who are normally very mature and capable will revert to an almost child- like state when they are sick. This works to a nurse’s benefit since most of us feel vulnerable when we are sick and want to know that there is someone near who cares and knows what to do to help us get well. Hypnosis can happen in a very informal way. Nurses can provide instruction on how to relax and enter trance state and once the patient is there she can offer beneficial suggestions.

There are different approaches to hypnosis that can be defined simply as permissive and authoritarian. Neither is more right than the other. Some may be more suited to your personality and to the needs of the individual patient. Patients may experience feelings of dependency and helplessness during their hospital stay. Nurses taking the authoritarian approach can tell the patient directly, in a matter of fact way, what he or she can expect in terms of a quick recovery. The permissive involves telling stories. This works really well with children but adults are surprisingly open to the approach. These uncertain patients can have their fears easily put to rest by a nurse who is able tell them happy stories that take their minds off the health challenge he or she is facing. Nurses can also tell stories about patients, just like them who made great progress as a result of this new medicine, procedure or life style change. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy either way. Nurses can help us to give ourselves permission to heal. That is all we really need.

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