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The Hospice–Hypnosis Connection

By Paul Gustafson

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Social hypnosis goes on all the time. We are constantly bombarded with information and messages targeted for our subconscious minds. Advertisers know that once a message reaches our subconscious it grows as an accepted belief. They also know that the process of becoming relaxed and focused in front of a television screen softens our critical conscious mind and opens our fertile subconscious to receive their uncensored messages. Our conscious mind normally evaluates everything we hear and see everyday of our lives. Advertisers capitalize on this unguarded moment to convince us that we want to buy what they have to sell.

The two ways that messages can reach our subconscious is by just hoping that the conscious mind will let it in, or to relax the analytical conscious mind allowing the message to go straight through.

Hypnosis either performed by a hypnotherapist, or through the efforts of a Wall Street advertising firm, is based on this simple technique. It can be as subtle as a 30 second television ad showing the Marlboro Man riding off into the sunset or as involved as a formal session designed to modify behavior. It can be divisive or benevolent.

The Hospice Connection

In ten years of nursing I've never seen a more attentive motivated group than the hospice family. Once you earn their trust, help them to become more relaxed and focused, you can enhance their ability to cope and manage the daily changes and inevitable hospice surprises by what you say and how you say it.

Most people go into nursing because they want to make a difference. In hospice nursing the opportunity to make a big difference pops up everyday. Most hospice families are ready and eager to hang on every word the hospice nurse has to say. They want straight answers, guidance and empowerment. Seize the moment. This is what all nurses are looking for, to teach important things to people in need and get positive results.

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Early on I realized that this group was starving for a compassionate ear. After the shock of their diagnosis and then chemotherapy or radiation, surgery, nausea, vomiting, hair loss, and then the ultimate hospice referral, this group always tends to have a few things on their mind.

Don't Just Do Something Sit There

Not only is this helpful to collect information, but it's also a cathartic process for them to experience. It puts them in position to hear your helpful words. Finally they get someone who just listens. What a pleasant surprise. Your job is easy, just ask open ended questions, get comfortable and let them run with it. When you think it is time speak, don't. Listen a little longer. Give them all the time they want.

This simple process of actively listening does three things. It supplies you with information, creates a

trusting therapeutic relationship and more importantly it helps them to focus and relax. You can almost see the relaxation unfolding as they speak. This may not necessarily be obvious on your first visit but usually it is. There are, of course, some families who haven't had a moment of peace their whole lives and they are not about to start with you. Be open minded, realistic and patient.

Planting Seeds of Confidence

Once you have your hospice family in a better place, how you speak and what you say can offer profound impact and direction. Speak slowly, confidently, with direct eye contact and use positive affirming tones. One statement should build on the next. For example: "you've shown that you can manage his pain and there is enough medication in the house." Any victory along the way is praised and added to your laundry list of positive review topics. Such as: "you did a great job repositioning him in bed, you've also made excellent decisions using the break–through medication and you know you can call us anytime." This positive review is where healthy seeds get planted.

By packaging up distracting emotional debris you can better offer direction, validation and clarity in a way that supports their continued growth and success. The more order and control you create the more relaxed and focused they become. The more at ease they are the more attention they pay to everything you say. Your words and suggestions will have a dramatic impact on their ability to cope and make difficult decisions while dealing with their own issues of grief.

Empowering Success

Your words become their thoughts and actions. Whether you like it or not you are in the position of authority and knowledge of all issues involved with this life transition. All eyes and ears are pointed in your direction so take advantage of this opportunity to position them for success.

By understanding the principles of suggestion and how the conscious and subconscious minds work, hospice nurses can empower effective change with every visit they make. The repetition of supportive constructive suggestions and affirmations to those in a more relaxed and focused state of mind can have an enormous therapeutic effect. Good nurses know the obvious advantages of reducing stress and putting their clients at ease, by also practicing these simple communication techniques your

hospice families will be more autonomous, confident and in control during this difficult transition.

Paul Gustafson RN, BSN, CH runs HealthyHypnosis.com of Burlington, Massachusetts. His 11 years of acute cardiac and hospice experience offer a solid foundation supporting his clinical approach to hypnotherapy. Visit HealthyHypnosis.com or call toll free at 888–290–3972.

What is hospice...and when is it appropriate for the Alzheimer's patient?

By William Hammond, J.D.

Hospice was established in the Middle Ages when shelters called hospices were available to travelers who had no place to stay. A couple of centuries later the first hospice was founded in London in 1668. The founder, Cicely Saunders, believed that these institutions geared to curing people were ignoring the special needs of the dying.

The first hospice in the United States was started in New Haven, Connecticut in 1974. From that beginning, the American model stressed hospice as a home service. Many of these hospices have helped a great number of families make their final days with their loved ones warm and memorable. Many terminally ill people and their families ask, "How will I know when it is the right time to call hospice?" There is not really an answer to this question. It all depends of individual circumstances and the stage of the patient in the illness.

The hospice staff is qualified and generally consists of a chaplain, certified nursing assistants, a medical director, registered nurse and social worker. They can assist you and the patient in many different areas: medically, psychologically, and spiritually. Some hospice agencies provide bereavement care to the family for several months following death.

Here are some of the signs that will let you know when to make your first call:

- If life expectancy is six months or less for an Alzheimer's patient. If the patient outlives this initial prognosis, the primary care physician may recertify the patient for a supplementary 60 day periods. Patients who stabilize may also come on and off hospice, as per their doctor's evaluation.
- If there are no more options for curative treatment and/or the individual does not wish to pursue further curative treatment.
- If pain and symptoms have begun to interfere with the quality of life of your loved ones and it becomes too difficult for them to stay at home without assistance.
- If adult children wish to learn more about the options for a parent's care and how to cope with the final stage, death.

When you decide to call hospice, you will not be left alone. The hospice team will support you and your needs. Chaplains present on the premises will guide you spiritually to ease the pain and suffering of a loss. Most hospices have group support meetings that will assist you.

To find a hospice in your area, here are the following options:

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- The yellow pages directory : www.yellowpages.com
- Hospital Medical Social Workers: hospital social workers may provide you with a list of hospices in your area.
- You can search on Internet search engines by typing "finding a hospice in my area."
- And often the best way to find hospice care for your loved one is simply to ask your doctor. He or she

will be able to give you some recommendations.

William G. Hammond, JD is a nationally known elder law attorney and founder of The Alzheimer's Resource Center. He is a frequent guest on radio and television and has developed innovative solutions to guide families who have a loved one suffering from Alzheimer's. For more information you can visit his website at www.BeatAlzheimers.com

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