

From the editor



No mystery about hypnosis

Hypnosis' decline in psychiatric training programs is surprising, given today's emphasis on short-term therapies. Hypnosis can be very useful—particularly for patients with anxiety disorders, phobias, and posttraumatic stress disorder—as David Spiegel, MD, of Stanford University writes in his thoughtful scientific review (*page 48*).

My first experience with hypnosis was as a University of North Carolina undergraduate, when a psychology professor did a group hypnotic induction. I scored 7 out of 12 on the Stanford Hypnotic Susceptibility Scale (SHSS), which indicated I was “moderately” hypnotizable. I felt good because the professor said hypnotizable people are curious, brave, and open to new experiences.

Later, as a Stanford University medical student, I was hired as a hypnotist at the Stanford Hypnotic Research Center. My job was to administer a new 5-point SHSS to undergraduates who had been screened with the 12-point version. The shorter version included a 30-minute hypnotic induction—instead of the regular 60 minutes—and was designed for clinical practice.

For 6 months I immediately hypnotized every student, and they all scored at the top of the scale. Naturally, I assumed I was God's gift to hypnosis. My euphoria ended abruptly, however, when one student scored zero. Rather than going into a trance, he stared at me for a half-hour with pity and mild aggression in his eyes.

From then on, every subject behaved the same way, and none scored more than 1 point. I resigned because I couldn't take it anymore. Later, I got over my narcissistic wound when I realized I had been involved in a blinded experiment to see how well the shorter scale evaluated students who scored very high *or* very low on the longer version.

Despite this setback, I have used hypnosis over the years to help treat a variety of psychiatric conditions, with varying degrees of success. I have never, however, regained a belief in my own singularity.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Randy Hillard'.

Randy Hillard, MD