

Anesthesiology

REPORT OF A CASE OF ROOT RESECTION PERFORMED UNDER HYPNOSIS

P. NOAKES, D.D.S., AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND

A 19-YEAR-OLD woman was referred to me by a local dental surgeon for the endodontic treatment of an upper right central incisor.

Radiographic examination indicated a root resection rather than ionic medication.

After the preliminary root canal therapy, the procedure to be followed was outlined to the patient. However, at the mention of local anesthesia, she absolutely refused to continue with the treatment, nor would she consider general anesthesia, stating that she was "allergic to narcotics." In the face of such refusal, it was explained that any form of conservative treatment was impossible and I would be able to do nothing for her. She was then dismissed.

The next day she communicated with me and asked if I would be willing to do the resection while she was in an hypnotic trance, explaining that a young man of her acquaintance had, on several occasions, produced such a state to the extent that he was able to drive needles into her arm painlessly. It was pointed out that a root resection was some degree removed from pin-pricking and would occupy approximately thirty minutes. Was she sure her mentor was capable of inducing such insensitivity for so long? She was confident. So an appointment was made on March 22 when, in the presence of two other dental surgeons and two medical witnesses, the hypnotic state was induced by her friend and the root resection and root filling carried to completion.

The outstanding points were these:

The approach of the hypnotist and the reception of the patient were healthy in every way. There was a complete lack of Svengalian mysticism. The surgery was not blacked out in any way nor were the usual noise-producing activities of the nurses curtailed during the operation. After the induction, the hypnotist appeared to ignore his subject and chatted with the witnesses. At three stages only, at approximately ten-minute intervals, did he speak to her, briefly reassuring her that she was "in a deep sleep, perfectly relaxed and feeling no pain."

Following the incision—you will understand with what trepidation I made this—there was no hemorrhage and the field was practically bloodless throughout the operation. I understand that this lack of bleeding is a feature of surgery performed under hypnosis, explainable perhaps by a contraction of the musculature during this state.

All eye reflexes were present but knee reflexes were abolished. Pulse rate was 100. The general appearance of the patient was of a person quietly reclining in a light sleep.

Before waking the patient at the completion of the resection, the hypnotist explained to her that the operation had been done and that she would awaken quite refreshed and feeling no discomfort or pain. And so it proved to be. She woke instantly at his command and indeed was by far the freshest and most relaxed person in the surgery.

But the really astonishing feature was this: Before he roused her, I suggested that it might be possible to control the edematous swelling that is an accompaniment of nearly all root resections. He agreed to try and spoke to the patient saying that on waking she would find her condition in no way altered from when she entered the surgery—no pain and no swelling would result. The following morning the patient reported at my surgery with not the slightest trace of edema. Nor has any appeared since. The incision was perfectly clean and already appeared to be healing. Of course a single case does not prove that edema can be so controlled. It may have been one of the cases in which there would have been none anyway. But from the extensive area involved I would have expected some swelling the next morning had the usual technique been adopted.