



Hypnosis can help reduce anxiety in children before their operation

16 January 2018

Hypnosis can be an effective treatment to reduce anxiety and stress in children who are scared of needles and hospital procedures according to a new medical publication released by the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists. The latest edition of *Australasian Anaesthesia*, a peer-reviewed reference for the College's 6400 anaesthetists and 1500 trainee anaesthetists which is published every two years, says hypnosis can be a simple but effective method of pain management for children and help reduce nausea and anxiety before and after their operation.

Hypnosis in paediatric care is explored by clinical senior lecturer in anaesthesia at the University of Adelaide Dr Rob Laing and clinical associate professor at the University of Sydney Dr Allan Cyna. Both are senior consultant anaesthetists at the Women's and Children's Hospital in Adelaide.

"Children who are anxious or in pain frequently experience hypnosis or trance-like states spontaneously making them highly responsive to suggestion...that can alter perceptions, mood and/or behaviour," Dr Laing and Dr Cyna write.

"Hypnosis can enhance analgesia, reduce peri-operative adverse effects such as nausea and allow patients to envisage recovery, healing and return to normal function."

Hypnosis is used to suggest altered pain perception, such as suggesting numbness or presence of local anaesthesia, or loss of sensation. Suggestions include replacing pain with comfort, laughter, relaxation, strength or confidence.

Common techniques used with children include comparing the electricity wiring in a house to "switches" on the body that can be turned off to prevent pain to limbs or other parts of the body. Another method involves specific suggestions for pleasant smells, hunger and comfort so the young patient thinks of strawberries or chocolate or another favourite food when inhaling anaesthetic gases.

"If the smell of strawberries is suggested and accepted, another suggestion of 'now you can look forward to eating strawberries when you wake' can be given to enhance appetite and reduce the risk of nausea."

Dr Laing and Dr Cyna refer to a case study involving seven year-old patient "Ruby" who had to be admitted to hospital for a thyroidectomy.

Having already experienced several hospital procedures Ruby was anxious about her operation and was offered hypnosis to help manage her needle phobia and reduce her anxiety and post-operative pain. She was taught how to imagine herself in a relaxing rainforest and then encouraged to smell the damp leaves in the rainforest as the anaesthetic was being prepared.

The approach worked for Ruby who, arriving in theatre before her operation "appeared calm and voluntarily climbed onto the operating table. She had an uneventful recovery with minimal analgesic requirements."