

Medical Acceptance Of Hypnosis

In 1892, the **British Medical Association** (BMA) responded to a growing interest in hypnotherapy by commissioning a special committee of eleven doctors *‘to investigate the nature of the phenomenon of hypnotism, its value as a therapeutic agent, and the propriety of using it.’* Their report was received and published by the BMA. It opens with a clear recognition of the phenomenon of hypnotic trance:

*‘The Committee, having completed such investigation of hypnotism as time permitted, have to report that they have satisfied themselves of **the genuineness of the hypnotic state.**’*
(BMA, 1892)

The BMA Committee proceeded to outline a detailed and accurate account of the physical and mental characteristics of hypnotic trance, concluding with a summary of its principal therapeutic benefits,

‘The Committee are of opinion that as a therapeutic agent hypnotism is frequently effective in relieving pain, procuring sleep, and alleviating many functional ailments.’ (BMA, 1892)

More than a half century later, in 1955, the British Medical Association formally endorsed the practice of teaching Hypnosis in medical schools. They approved it as a recognized form of medical practice. Also in 1955 the Psychological Medicine Group of the BMA commissioned a Subcommittee of experts to deliver a second report, which was published in the British Medical Journal (BMJ) the same year under the title of *‘Medical use of hypnotism’*. Its terms of reference were:

‘To consider the uses of hypnotism, its relation to medical practice in the present day, the advisability of giving encouragement to research into its nature and application, and the lines upon which such research might be organized.’ (BMA, 1955)

The 1955 Subcommittee endorse the previous 1892 report, republishing it in the appendix to their work, they comment that its conclusions *‘showed remarkable foresight and are mainly applicable today.’* They also provide a more extensive statement on the medical uses of hypnosis and conclude that it is definitely an effective technique in the psychotherapy of neurosis, psycho-somatic conditions and in the alleviation of physical pain:

*‘The Subcommittee is satisfied after consideration of the available evidence that hypnotism is of value and may be **the treatment of choice** in some cases of so-called psycho-somatic disorder and psychoneurosis. It may also be of value for revealing unrecognized motives and conflicts in such conditions. As a treatment, in the opinion of the Subcommittee it has proved its ability to remove symptoms and to alter morbid habits of thought and behavior. [...]*

In addition to the treatment of psychiatric disabilities, there is a place for hypnotism in the production of anesthesia or analgesia for surgical and dental operations, and in suitable

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subjects it is an effective method of relieving pain in childbirth without altering the normal course of labor.’ (BMA, 1955)

Following this report the **British Society of Medical & Dental Hypnosis (BSMDH)** was formed and its training officially approved by the BMA. Subsequently the BSMDH was recognized by the General Medical and Dental Councils, the Medical Protection Society and the Medical Defense Union. The Royal Society of Medicine now has a section devoted to the dissemination of research on *‘Hypnosis and Psychosomatic Medicine’*

This was followed in 1958 by the **American Psychological Association** forming a specialty in Hypnosis. This professional association established a certifying board of examiners in both clinical and experimental Hypnosis.

At a formal meeting of the **American Medical Association (AMA) in 1959, Hypnosis was granted "official status" of an "adjunctive tool" in medicine.** As such, it completed the professional acceptance of Hypnosis and raised it to a new level. Adding to this, in 1961, the AMA recommended that medical professionals receive 144 hours of training in hypnotherapy. **However, this rarely happens.**

Hypnosis has, thus, been established as a legitimate subject of scientific inquiry. Research studies have abounded. Hypnosis is now a thriving topic for both experimentation and clinical application. A growing number of physicians and surgeons employ the therapeutic effects of Hypnosis with their patients in the areas of pain management, pre-and post-operative anesthesia, relaxation and control of blood flow.

Added to this, Hypnosis has become represented by numerous professional organizations. In addition, leading national and international journals have been established for publishing Hypnosis research.