

HYPNOSIS in Clinical Practice: Steps for Mastering Hypnotherapy

By Rick Voit & Molly Delaney

A Book Review by Bruce N. Eimer, Ph.D., ABPP

As any beginning or seasoned psychotherapist and hypnosis clinician knows, words are our main tools of the trade. Our patients communicate their complaints to us in words. We communicate our questions, our suggestions, and solutions to them in words. In turn, words paint pictures. They can sharpen them, and also muddy them up.

The Spoken Word

The spoken word is the hypnotist's main medium of expression with which he can weave a tale that heals. The experienced clinician understands that the ability to employ the spoken word skillfully and therapeutically comes from learning from the lessons of life and from clinical experience. This is the basis of concept formation and core beliefs.

The skillful use of words for healing purposes requires an optimal combination of brevity and complexity. One can use a lot of words to say little, or repeat the same idea, and one can use a few words to convey a lot.

As a seasoned workshop presenter and teacher, one learns that students want an optimal combination of didactic and experiential learning. The best workshops explain a concept, then give case examples of its application, then demonstrate it, then have the students practice applying it, and then discuss the experience and address questions. Workshops that are overly didactic, abstract, and pedantic, routinely get poor evaluations unless the workshop presenter is at the level of a Nobel Laureate.

The authors of this text are both seasoned clinicians. I picked up their book eagerly expecting to learn some new ideas that could help me become a better

hypnotherapist and clinical supervisor. As I practice hypnotherapy day in and day out, like many clinicians in solo practice, I am hungry for ideas that can empower my practice and help me better manage difficult cases. I look for good metaphors--seedlings for clinical creativity, step-by-step techniques--nuts and bolts of efficacious practice, and inspiration. It is a truism that success in life's endeavors is one part inspiration and three parts perspiration. The same idea applies to success in clinical practice—for the both the clinician and the patient.

Unfortunately, this text did not provide me with (or help me construct) what I was hoping for. Many important clinical ideas were touched on, but few were adequately developed in a way that weaves a web of novelty, curiosity and optimal stimulation. The book was sleep inducing. Unfortunately, most of the useful ideas outlined in the book's excellent table of contents were lost in a loosely organized, overly didactic presentation of abstract concepts, personal anecdotes, and sermonizing.

Fundamental Truths about Clinical Hypnosis

To be fair, there are some fundamental truths about clinical hypnosis and psychotherapy and the authors of this text exhaustively lay these self-evident truths out.

1. Hypnosis is a clinical tool to be used skillfully by licensed health professionals to enhance their treatment of the types of symptoms and problems that they are qualified to treat within their field of specialization with or without hypnosis.
2. Don't practice in areas in which you aren't qualified.
3. Build rapport with your patient.
4. Listen carefully to your patient and speak your patient's language.

5. Hypnotic phenomena are both the language of symptoms and a means for their cure or management.
6. Assess your patient's hypnotic talents and utilize them in the service of the treatment.
7. Assess and utilize your own hypnotic talents.
8. Employ lots of ego strengthening in your work.
9. Recognize that the work of the clinician/therapist is to integrate both conscious and unconscious understandings. So, find your own inner voice.
10. Trust yourself and practice becoming conscious of your reactions and responses to your patient.
11. Facilitate both trance depth and breath.
12. Incorporate both direct and indirect suggestions.
13. Make use of post-hypnotic suggestions.
14. Practice ethically.
15. Develop a treatment plan as a road map for treatment.

However, in this writer's view, the authors go too far in opining that their conceptualization of hypnosis and behavior is the exclusive domain of psychotherapy. It is not. All of the above points apply to any of the health and spiritual professions in which clinical hypnosis is employed as a tool (e.g., medicine, surgery, dentistry, physical therapy and rehabilitation, clinical social work, clinical psychology, pastoral care)(Zarren & Eimer, 2001).

Much of the book involves the authors preaching about the ethics of clinical practice in general and of hypnosis practice in particular. The reader gets the distinct

feeling that he is being lectured to as a first year graduate student. It gets tiring and requires that the reader drink a lot of coffee to stay awake.

A Hypnotherapy Workshop Outline

The book's table of contents is well organized. However, as one reads through the book, one gets the distinct impression that he is hearing the same points (proscriptions and permissions) over and over again.

This book's table of contents can serve as an outline for a workshop on hypnosis and psychotherapy: Chapter 1 covers conceptualizing hypnosis, defining trance, unconscious processes, ethical practice, and informed consent and memory. Chapter 2 covers the hypnotic relationship and the therapist's conscious use of self. Chapter 3 covers assessing the patient's strengths and viewing symptoms as solutions. Chapter 4 covers hypnotic phenomena and facilitating trance depth and breath.

Chapters 5 through 7 cover treatment planning. Chapter 5 covers the language of hypnosis induction, and the direct and indirect use of the language of suggestion. Chapter 6 covers managing and utilizing patient resistance, and Chapter 7 covers ego strengthening, the use of imagery, and post-hypnotic suggestions.

The book also has an Appendix section that lists professional organizations, and that presents a "Hypnotic Treatment Planning Worksheet", an "Informed Consent Form", and a reprint of American Society of Clinical Hypnosis's Ethical Code of Conduct (2003).

While the potential was there to create a how-to book, this book is not such a book. There are no trance scripts or specific treatment plans. The book is written on a

highly abstract level. It reads more like an expanded and exhaustive Guide to Professional Ethics than a clinical text.

Good Therapy

It is a fundamental truth that good psychotherapy is good therapy no matter what one's practice orientation (e.g., psychodynamic, psychoanalytic, cognitive, behavioral, gestalt, experiential, existential). Good clinical rapport and honorable intentions are the mortar that hold the bricks (read "technique") together in any clinical health field. As the late dentist, psychologist, good friend, and Past ASCH President, Louis Dubin used to say (personal communication), a good clinician must know psychology and physiology and have a bag of techniques. He also added "feeling" and "heart". They all go hand in hand.

A good book gives you heart--is heartening. Good therapy gives heart--is heartening (Ewin & Eimer, 2006). All good (read "effective") psychotherapy clinicians, regardless of their theoretical orientation are heartening. There is no good therapy without deep rapport.

Somehow or other I got the impression after reading Voit and Delaney's book twice that these two seasoned clinicians and clinical hypnosis teachers tried really hard to create a roadmap to help the reader/clinician get further along in his journey to develop his own personal clinical style and find his own therapeutic voice. This is a good thing. We don't need a hundred more Milton Ericksons. Unfortunately, they got sidetracked in their efforts to perhaps incorporate too many considerations in one tightly packed little volume. But, their valiant efforts were not in vain. The book can serve as a useful

outline and fertile source of ideas for clinical hypnosis teachers, workshop presenters and clinical supervisors.

If one can persevere, one can still stimulate the production of a lot of useful ideas with this book as a guide.

References

Ewin, D.M., & Eimer, B.N. (2006). Ideomotor Signals for Rapid Hypnoanalysis: A How-To Manual. Springfield, IL: Charles Thomas.

Zarren, J.I. & Eimer, B.N. (2001). Brief Cognitive Hypnosis: Facilitating the Change of dysfunctional behavior. New York: Springer Publishing Company.