

ACUHYPNO: A new therapeutic intervention in rehabilitation

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Hypnotherapy and **Traditional Chinese Acupuncture** have gained credibility over the years in their effectiveness for treating various health conditions. Usually, these treatments are administered separately as part of a multidimensional therapeutic program.

The use of **mental imagery** was explored through hypnosis and acupuncture concurrently in the same session with the aim of assisting:

- Motor relearning in SCI patients
- Phantom limb pain in amputee patients
- Improving complex pain
- Sleep hygiene
- Reducing stress and anxiety

1 Role of Mental Imagery

Mental imagery refers to the cognitive rehearsal of any experience in the mind. It does not require the body to actually move and is self-generated by the patient using sensory and perceptual processes to enable the reactivation of specific motor actions within working memory. The areas of the brain involved in planning and execution of movement are also active during the imagination of a movement. Mental imagery can strengthen synaptic connections that underlie actual motor function as seen in sport and music.

2 Methodology

Twenty seven patients have so far received Acuhypno as part of their therapeutic programme. Each session was planned and tailored to an individual's presenting symptoms and goals. The patients presented with the following conditions:

- Complete/ Incomplete Spinal Cord Injury (12)
- Amputation of upper and lower limb (7)
- Complex polytrauma (3)
- Functional Neurological Disorder (2)
- Traumatic Brain Injury (3)

Each patient's suggestibility and capacity to imagine was clearly evaluated before the intervention as this could affect success rate. Although mental imagery is shown to improve through repeated exposure and practice.

As an aide to mental imagery education around muscle, nerve and bone function was completed with each patient prior to treatment starting to enable an underlying awareness of their own motor function.

Bespoke scripts were created for each patient. **Visual** and **kinaesthetic** imagery was used so patients could both 'see and feel' from within. This included:

- Deep breath awareness
- Progressive muscle relaxation
- Induction/ Deepener
- Imagining a familiar task such as daily hand exercises.
- Imagining a fictional task to connect to tactile sensation. Imagining a 'safe place' where they can let go of pain or anxiety.

3 Data

Individual goal or symptom orientated participant-rated scales (0-10) were collected alongside subjective feedback on their perceptions related to their individual goals or symptoms. Individual goals involved improvements in symptoms such as pain, stiffness, sleep and anxiety.

Each case was evaluated individually; comparing subjective and participant-related scale data at start and end of a programme of Acuhypno sessions.

Results:

- Across all twenty seven cases, improvements were found across pain, relaxation and sleep.
- Perception of motor function improvement was found to vary and may be influenced by external variables.
- Greater sense of connection to patients bodies and reduction in phantom limb sensations described by amputee patients.
- One patient reported increased sense of smell following Post-Traumatic Anosmia.

Three cases had comprehensive before and after scores for each individual Acuhypno session and showed the following results:

- One patient reported 100% improvement in pain (taken from data at the start and end of treatments).
- Two SCI patients reported on average 24% improvement in hand function.

Acupuncture works around inserting fine needles into certain points on the body linked to channels or 'meridians' that conduct Qi; a vital life force believed to regulate spiritual, emotional, mental and physical balance. During the course of acupuncture treatment, specific chemicals release into the body, which are suggested to affect pain both physically and psychologically.



Hypnotherapy uses a set of procedures in which the hypnotherapist suggests to the patient various changes in sensation, perception, cognition, or control over behaviour.

Hypnosis can be described as a heightened state of relaxation or a state of focused attention.



At an individual level, Acuhypno has demonstrated subjective benefits for patients with goals around pain, relaxation and sleep, alongside benefits in amputee rehabilitation. It presents a safe therapeutic modality providing an approach that can be easily adapted to a patient's symptoms and goals. The practitioners involved experienced that Acuhypno can provide powerful experiential moments in individuals by utilising patient's own inner rehearsal mode during the usual 20 mins downtime retained by acupuncturists.

Acuhypno is customised to each participant and part of a wider rehabilitation programme limiting broader generalisations. Therefore, larger scale evaluations are needed with a particular focus on establishing the influence of the confounding variables, such as physiotherapy and other medical treatments on outcomes.

Patient feedback:

"Leaves you feeling really relaxed. Relaxed completely, cleansed and lighter like you've just come out of the shower. The pain goes down to a 1 or a 0, doesn't come back 'till they start turning me" - SCI Patient

Patient feedback:

"Utterly useful and really, really good. An intrinsic part of the therapy programme" - Amputee patient