Letter to the Editor:
What Suggestion Is Best for Pain?

We need good experimental studies of what suggestion gives the best pain relief.

The clinical evidence is accumulating that suggestions of pleasure do best. Medicine didn’t pay much attention when Norman Cousins (1976) cured himself of debilitating fibromyositis by watching funny movies and laughing his pain away. There is a well-known comorbidity of chronic pain with depression, and depressed people seldom laugh except sardonically. Recently, Faymonville et al. (1999) reported on 1650 major surgical cases operated under hypnoanalgesia with only 13 requiring a switch to general anesthesia. Their technique was the revivification of pleasurable life experiences. I have been sending my burn patients to their “laughing place” for 30 years with good results (Ewin, 1983).

Experimentally, Heath used deep probes into animal and human brains to locate a “pleasure center” in the septal region. In the booklet that summarizes his work (Heath, 1996), he says “Physical pain of various origins was alleviated promptly and dramatically by electrical stimulation of sites in the brain’s pleasure system. The pain of metastatic carcinoma, uncontrolled by high doses of morphine, for example, was relieved for as long as a week after stimulation of the septal region for 15 minutes (100 Hz, 3-5 mill amperes) (Heath et al 1954). For seven months before she died, patient A-6 (L.W.), who had carcinoma of the uterus, received electrical stimulation of the septal region at intervals of one day to one week (depending on control of the pain). During that period, she was essentially free of pain and required no further analgesic medication.” He notes that when pleasure takes over, pain disappears.

Wouldn’t it be interesting if a hypnotic revivification of a pleasurable experience caused the pleasure center to light up on a PET scan? In addition, if the subject happened to be a chronic pain patient who got relief, the study would have Nobel Prize implications.

Surely someone can get a grant to test this.

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References


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**Correction.** In the article “Operationalizing Trance I: Rationale and Research Using a Psychophenomenological Approach” by Ronald J. Pekala and V. K. Kumar which appeared in the October 2000 issue (Volume 43 number 2), the following references were incorrectly printed:
