Psychotherapeutic Intervention for Numerous and Large Viral Warts with Adjunctive Hypnosis: A Case Study

Stephen Lankton
Phoenix, AZ

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Hypnotherapeutic Intervention for numerous and large viral warts

Psychotherapy with adjunctive hypnosis is known to be an effective approach for the treatment of viral warts. There is an increasing clinical and scientific literature that illustrates the successful use of psychotherapeutic treatment with and without hypnosis in the reduction or elimination of viral warts (Bloch, 1927; Chandrasena, 1982; Clawson & Swade, 1975; Dreaper, 1978; Ewin, 1992; Ewin, 1995; and Goldstein, 2005; Obermayer & Greenon, 1949; McDowell, 1949; Reid, 1989; Scott, 1960; Spanos, Stenstrom & Johnston, 1988; Spanos, Williams & Gwynn, 1990; Surman et al., 1973; Morris, 1985; Noll, 1994; Noll, 1988; O’Laughlan, 1995; Tasini & Hackett, 1977; Vollmer, 1946; Yalom, 1964).

In this case study the veracious area experienced a 100% reduction in five treatment sessions spanning a total of seven weeks. In this case, psychotherapy with hypnotic treatment relied upon an emphasis on two interventions: reduction of wart area with guided imagery and suggestions for the optimization of the client’s immune system functioning. Photos illustrate the client’s pre-treatment, mid-treatment, and post-treatment state. Causal factors in the client’s recovery cannot be easily isolated but the startling results attest to the efficacy of the overall interventions and treatment context compared to prior medical interventions.

Case History

The client was a sixteen-year-old girl. She is an active cheerleader in her high school and had highly developed verbal and social skills. She had actively sought medical help for five years for a small wart on the back of her left hand (and later her legs). Her physician, at that initial time, prescribed cryotherapy for the
removal of the wart on the back of her hand. The paradoxical result was that the wart significantly increased in size. This unsuccessful treatment was followed with treatments of salicylic acid, retinoid cream application, tape occlusion, cantharidin, curettage, electro-surgery, and these unsuccessful treatments were followed by laser surgery - also unsuccessful. The result in every case was both an increase in the size of the wart and an increase in the number of warts and affected area. The client reported that she had often slept with her hands between her legs at night and had, therefore, apparently affected the growth of more than 200 smaller warts on the inside of both of her legs from her thighs to her calves.

Her self-image was damaged as a result of these prolific and highly visible warts. As a result she received the diagnosis of “mood disorder due to medical condition” (DMS 293.89). She did not have the slightest belief that any treatment would help, especially a treatment as unusual as psychotherapy with hypnosis. Nevertheless, she and her family had come to think that this was the “last resort” and they wanted to, in her words, “give it a try.”

When she first arrived for treatment her condition was severe. The size of the combined warts on the back of her left hand was approximately 3 cm long by 4 cm wide and 3 mm in height tissue. See Figure one. This affected area consisted of three large areas and some adjoining wart. She tried to hide this hand from the view of others due to the size of the warts. She felt like she should avoid dating. Other than her cheerleading activities, she had little social interactions.

**Figure 1: The pre-treatment condition**
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Case History

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Treatment

Treatment began with an introduction to hypnosis and the intervention process. The client was informed that hypnosis was not a “magic bullet.” Furthermore, the following points about hypnosis in therapy were discussed in the waking state.
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- Hypnosis is more like the waking state and less like sleep.
- Hypnosis is a matter of the client being active and engaged rather than passively receiving a cognitive idea outside of awareness (an unconscious suggestion).
- The client’s participation creates whatever success may occur (and not hypnosis).
- During hypnosis she may experience amnesia and time distortion.
- Clients should modify my suggestions to fit their personal experience.

Each session began with an induction that followed the protocol Lankton & Lankton described as conscious/unconscious dissociation (1983). After the deepening and ratification phase of the induction, treatment followed according to the outline below. Since the client did not believe in the possibility of a success using medicine, and especially psychotherapy delivered with hypnosis, the author decided to dedicate a substantial portion of each trance explaining how her immune system functioning might increase using hypnosis and suggestion. The intent of the following interventions was to provide a plausible explanation that might enlist her participation with reduced resistance.

First, an educational presentation regarding the manner in which her immune system functioning may increase due to relaxation was presented to the client in terms suitable for a teenager. The discussion emphasized that her relaxation caused greater capillary dilation, increase blood flow to her skin, and an ease in breathing that resulted in an increase percent of hemoglobin cells taking on two oxygen atoms with less effort, more muscle relaxation and oxygen burning, an increased feeling of warmth and well being, and a higher production of T-cells, B and T lymphocytes, phagocytic/dendritic cells, white corpuscles, and other associated antibodies in her blood — all of which suggest increased possibilities for healing various ailments.

Second, an expectation that the client would produce nerve cells and other skin cells in an atmosphere of health and safety created by the aforementioned state.

Third, the increased T-cells, white corpuscles, and antibodies, would find greater access to her skin due to her relaxation.

Fourth, these allies of her healthy functioning would attack the unhealthy wart cells and this attack would cause her unhealthy wart cells to be shed from her body.

Fifth, the wart cells would be shed from her body in a manner similar to the visual image of lemmings jumping from a hill to their demise. Note that the client was aware of a computer game in which little “cute” images of lemmings jumped off hillsides in a very charming manner. The image of this computer game was deliberately chosen.

Sixth, reorientation to waking state was conducted without any special instruction.

Finally, on the third and fourth visit, the visualization of youthful, healthy, and beautiful skin was added to her treatment. That is, after eliciting an affect of pleasure and pride, she was asked to imagine looking at her hands, arms, and legs, and to be please and proud of the healthy and attractive skin that she would find there.

The client commented on her estimate of the elapsed time after each session and in every case had experienced time distortion. Her 40-minute trance experiences seemed to her to be about ten minutes during each session. She was not asked to recall the content of the trance; Any possible experience of amnesia could not be assessed. However, I am not suggesting that the client experienced amnesia.

The first two treatment sessions were dedicated entirely to the reduction of the wart on her hand. The decision to proceed in this manner was based on the assumption that the obvious cosmetic impact of such a large wart was a high priority to a teenager. In addition,
if the client was to discover a change in that wart, she would have more confidence in healing the more than 200 warts on her legs.

**Results of Treatment and Follow up**

Between session one and two, the client became encouraged that a noticeable reduction of the wart on her hand occurred. The time between the first and second session was 29 days. The time between the second and third session was seven days. A photo prior to the third session shows the obvious progress she experienced. Size reduction was changed from the original approximately 4 cm by 3 cm to 2.5 cm by 1 cm.

**Figure 2: Beginning of the 3rd Visit (result of 2 visits)**

During her third and fourth visits, the warts on her legs also were included in the interventions. They were added to the target area for the increased blood flow, capillary access, and immune systems enhancement.

Her fourth session was one week later. In that session she reported that the wart on her hand was entirely gone (Figure three) and the only problem that remained was the pink skin and minor scar tissue seen in the illustration below. The over 200 warts previously covering very large areas of her legs had, at that time, been reduced to one wart on each leg, one on the top of the knee of her left leg and one on the back of her knee on her right leg.
One week later the client arrived for her fifth and final session. She reported that all of her warts were gone and that she was enormously grateful for what had been achieved in therapy. The author ended the session after twenty minutes with the comment by quoting a statement the author once heard from Dr. Milton H. Erickson, “It’s a pleasure to do good work with good material” (Milton H. Erickson, personal communication, July 19, 1976).

Discussion

In the process of seeking medical treatment for warts over a period of five years this client had experienced a great deal of disappointment. The visible wart on her hand had grown from a small single circle to a size that was embarrassing. Additionally, the affected area had spread from the back of her hand to the inside of both of her legs leaving her with more than 200 smaller warts on her legs. Before seeking aid by means of psychotherapy with hypnosis, she had tried medical aid waited for an additional period of seven months before seeking psychotherapy with hypnosis.

One of the unique aspects of this case is the length that the client and her family had gone to to exhaust every medical solution to remove the warts. The duration between her last medical treatment and seeking psychotherapy with hypnosis was sufficient to rule-out any latent or residual curative effect that might have been set in motion by medical treatments. She approached therapy with disappointment, doubt, and skepticism.

Therapy consisted of education and suggestions for increased immune system activity and the visualization of warts leaving her body’s surface. After only four sessions spanning nearly two months, all of her warts were gone. Several factors may have influenced her success. These include the increase of her immune system per the hypnotic suggestions, her motivation for a cure having exhausted all known medical options, placebo effect, or any other unknown condition including time factors that may have allowed a previous medical procedure to finally work.
Lankton

One cannot know from this case what the causative variables might have been that created this client’s success. It is possible that her success was a result of a functional increase in her immune system. However, what stimulated that increase is unknown. One can speculate on a few possible contributing or causal factors:

1) The result was expectancy that resulted from the non-medical interpersonal style that was personally empowering. Some literature discusses changes due to attitude (Kirsch, 1985; Spanos, Stenstrom, & Johnston, 1988; Spanos, Williams, & Gwynn, 1990);

2) The success may have been the result of increased relaxation and attention directed toward the infected area that produced undocumented physical improvements;

3) The success may have been a placebo effect that created by a mind-set of novelty in dealing with a non-traditional approach (Clarke, 1965; Spanos, Stenstrom, & Johnston 1988); and

4) The success may have been the result of an unconscious response to suggestions that her body would muster additional immune defenses against viral invasion.

It is notable that the blood flow was increased in this case, while other studies have been conducted successfully with blood flow being diminished to the wart area (Clawson, 1975; Frischholz, personal communication, 2006). It seems that, while alteration of blood flow may be a causal variable, the direction of change is not necessarily important at all. Alternatively, change in blood flow may not be a significant variable to manipulate for securing a cure for warts. Without larger controlled studies one cannot easily isolate the causative variables that result in the reduction of warts in clients using hypnotic treatments. It is encouraging, however, that we can bring relief and hope into the lives of our patients and help significantly improve their self-image.

References

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