

Are you positive?

Our choice of language can produce the opposite effect to what we intend. Now don't read this article, writes Mike Gow...



I'm going to let you in on a secret that could change your professional (and personal) life forever.

I'm going to share with you what is probably the most powerful, practice changing skill I have learned. It is very simple, easy to do once you get the hang of it, and it can be used by every dentist in their day-to-day work and personal life.

The secret is simply using the power of positive language and suggestion.

Earlier this year the British Society of Medical and Dental Hypnosis (Scotland) was fortunate enough to have Norman Vaughton present an excellent workshop entitled *The use of language for effective hypnotherapy*. Norman discussed and demonstrated how important positive language is in both hypnosis, and also in achieving excellent rapport and communication on a day-to-day basis with patients, work colleagues, family and friends.

To demonstrate how negative language and suggestion can have the opposite effect to that intended, Norman asked us to consider the following:

'Whatever you choose to think about right now – just don't think about elephants. Don't think about an elephant that you have seen before perhaps in a zoo, a circus, on safari or even on TV.

'Certainly don't think about African or Indian elephants and how their ears are different shapes and sizes. Don't even think about soft toy elephants, and that they are often either blue or pink. Don't think about wooden carvings or ornaments of elephants. Try not to even remember looking at a picture or photograph you have seen of an elephant. Whatever you think about – just don't think about elephants right now.'

Despite these instructions – what are you thinking about? To 'not' think about something, you have to think about it!

Imagine saying to a child: 'I'm leaving the room for a minute. Don't open that red box.' To understand the concept of 'not' opening the red box, the child has to think about and imagine what it would be like to open it. Often they will then do just that!

The unconscious mind is unable to understand negatives. The effect of negative suggestion was recently

demonstrated by Derren Brown in his TV programme, *Trick or Treat*.

Had the child been told 'I'm leaving the room for a minute, leave that red box alone', he or she would be more likely to follow the instruction. It would be even better to say: 'I'm leaving the room for a minute, just keep playing with that toy until I get back'.

The climax of the programme very dramatically demonstrated how negative suggestion can have the opposite effect to the command given.

Derren repeatedly told his subject not to 'press the big red button which would electrocute a cute kitten in a box before the clock counts down to zero'.

Of course, the girl eventually pressed the button with seconds to go! The kitten, by the way, was fine – the big red button did nothing.

If you want to see a clip from the programme, type 'Derren Brown Kitten' into the search box of www.youtube.com.

Stay positive

Incidentally, look again at the intro to this article. Despite what it clearly instructed, what did you end up doing?

Imagine now what happens when we say things to a patient such as 'don't worry, this won't hurt', 'don't cry', 'this won't take long', or 'don't worry, you don't have cancer'. Despite your best intentions to reassure them, what do you think will be going through that patient's mind – especially if they are anxious?

It would be far better to say 'relax, all you will feel is a little pressure', 'tears can be healing, let them dry up in their own time', 'this will be very quick', or 'relax, everything is entirely healthy'.

As well as learning how to effectively use positive language and suggestions it is also important to avoid emotive language. For example replace the word 'pain' with 'pressure', 'drill' with 'handpiece' and so on.

The use of positive language and suggestion is strongly emphasised on the British Society of Medical and Dental Hypnosis (Scotland) hypnosis training modules (email mail@bsmdh-scot.com or call 0141 229 0222 for more details).

I am very grateful to Dr Hetty MacKinnon, whose teachings on the BSMDH (Scotland) courses have changed the way I work with patients. Techniques I have learned from Hetty, other members of the society and our many highly-skilled guest speakers such as Norman Vaughton have provided me with invaluable techniques and tools to use in many aspects of my day to day work.

I want share with you the advice leaflet that I give to patients following the removal of a tooth. Notice the use of positive language and suggestion.

Notice how different the language in this advice leaflet is to that one in the drawer at your reception. Read the leaflet that you used to give your patients, and compare the two sets of instructions. Which one would you rather read if you had just had a tooth removed?



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Mike practices at the Berkeley Clinic, Glasgow (www.berkeleyclinic.com), and is currently studying for a Masters in Dental Anxiety Management at the University of Edinburgh. He teaches on the training modules of the BSMDHS. For more information on these, visit www.bsmdh-scot.com.

Mike welcomes private referrals. For more information, call 0141 564 1900 or visit his personal website at www.whatfear.com.

Advice after tooth removal



Now that the tooth has been removed, the healing process has already begun. It is important that you take good care of the healing socket. By following these instructions you will be surprised how quickly and comfortably the area heals. Any sensations you have over the next few days are usually healing sensations.

- Relax and take things easy for the rest of today and tomorrow. Resting and relaxing will maintain your pulse at a low rate and the healing will progress quickly and comfortably. Give yourself some tender loving care.
- Take painkillers as advised by your dentist. By taking the first tablet before the numbness wears off, you will ensure maximum comfort. Follow your dentist's instructions.
- Wait for six hours following the procedure before you rinse your mouth. Rinse gently with a warm salty solution (level teaspoon of salt in a pint of warm water). Gently rinse after every meal, first thing in the morning and last thing at night for seven days.
- For the first 24 hours avoid alcohol, very hot or cold drinks, and smoking.
- For the next few days, chew on the other side of your mouth and avoid the socket with your toothbrush and tongue.
- Use an extra pillow tonight to keep your head higher than your heart to reduce any bleeding and help the healing process.
- Unless you have been told otherwise, the entire tooth, with its roots, has now been removed. You might notice small

fragments of the thin bone that were around the tooth working their way out. This is perfectly normal.

- Any swelling or bruising will subside as the area heals. This can be greatly reduced by taking Arnica (Appendix I).

Regarding bleeding

It is normal for some bleeding to occur. This is part of the healing process. Remember, that a small amount of blood seems much more when it is diluted with saliva. The following advice will help to reduce any bleeding and allow you to stay calm and in control.

If the bleeding is continuous, keep your head higher than your heart to reduce the bleeding. Keep upright, sitting or standing.

Avoid rinsing to allow a clot to form. Clear the mouth of loose blood clots with a clean linen square or tissue so that you can find where the socket is bleeding. Use a gauze pad if extra were provided by the dentist, or alternatively use clean paper handkerchief or tissue to form a firm pad. Place the pad across the bleeding socket from the tongue to the cheek side. If the socket is between two standing teeth constrict the pad to fit.

Bite firmly to compress the pad on the socket and continue to sit up or stand. Keep the pad in position for 10 minutes after which, you should gently remove it, inspect the socket in a mirror and then replace the pad, (or use a fresh one). Stop using the pads when the bleeding stops.

If after an hour or two you have failed to control the bleeding, contact your dentist or NHS24 for further advice.

Remember: Now that the tooth has been removed, the healing process has already begun. By following the above instructions normally the area heals quickly and comfortably.

Appendix I - Arnica 30c

Arnica is available from any health food shop. Drops are best if available. It is preferable to start taking the Arnica just before the tooth is removed. Repeat or start taking it as soon as possible afterwards. Take every two hours on the first day. Take four times per day thereafter. Stop taking Arnica as soon as swelling or bruising has settled.

WARNING: If you are taking an anticoagulant drug (eg: Warfarin), unfortunately Arnica is contraindicated and unsuitable for you, and should be avoided.

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