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Breathe deep, think positive

By KAREN LONG - klong@kcchronicle.com
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GENEVA – The Rev. Dr. C. Scot Giles directed about 18 people at LivingWell Cancer Resource Center to take deep breaths.

As they inhaled, he told them to roll their eyes up as if they were looking at the top of their heads, then slowly close their eyes.

He told them to exhale.

"I invite you to imagine yourself floating," he said. "Just experience that relaxation."

The technique put the people in trances by simulating rapid eye movement sleep and allowing relaxation, he said.

Giles then reverses the directions and brings the audience back from their trances. They nod when he asks whether they felt relaxed.

The trance and other forms of self-hypnosis relax patients and open their minds to suggestion, which can lead to increased receptivity to medicine and better quality of life during treatment, Giles said.

"The human body is physically stronger when thoughts and the mind are positive," he said. "The human body is physically weaker when thoughts and the mind are negative."

Kelly Engel, 41, of St. Charles was diagnosed with ovarian cancer in 2003. She said support groups haven't provided what she needs to deal with the ups and downs of her treatment, so she attended Giles's July 10 program at LivingWell.

"I need to learn how to deal with it now," Engel said.

Kelly Porretta, 36, of Yorkville has lived with leukemia for a couple of years and has been in remission for the last eight months. The information about positive affirmations brought her to LivingWell's program.

"I thought it was exceptional," she said, adding that she liked that Giles shared his experiences. "It inspired me to do the same."

Researchers have conducted several studies to gauge the effectiveness of hypnosis at easing pain and anxiety related to a variety of health problems – from children with frequent headaches to women undergoing breast biopsies to patients with sickle-cell disease, according to the National Library of Medicine and the National Institutes of Health.

And hypnosis is not the technique you see in stage acts, said Dr. Robert Bayer, oncologist and hematologist with LaGrange Oncology Associates at Delnor-Community Hospital in Geneva.

"There's a perception that it's a parlor trick or a game," he said. "Medical hypnosis is actually different than that."

A National Health Interview Study released in 2004 indicated that 36 percent of adults used some form of complementary or alternative therapy – such as meditation and deep-breathing exercises – in the past 12 months, according to the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine. When the definition of that therapy included prayer specifically for health reasons, the results jumped to 62 percent.

Hypnotism by a professional or self-hypnotism through affirmations and other techniques are not for everyone, Bayer said.

"There are some people who are more accepting of that than others," Bayer said. "There are patients who are more open to alternative things like that. There are many people who are not hypnotizable."

Bayer, who has referred patients to Giles, said hypnosis can offer better quality of life during illnesses. One of his former patients, a 30-year-old man with a pelvic tumor, had to take large doses of morphine to deal with the pain, Bayer said. But with hypnosis therapy, the man was able to reduce his morphine intake.

"He didn't live longer, but at least for the last month of his life, he did have some quality time with his family," Bayer said.

Giles said hypnosis can help patients manage pain, which in turn can help them eat better, sleep better and think optimistically.

"By doing things that improve a person's overall vitality and robustness, we allow them to receive maximum doses of chemotherapy they're getting from their physicians," Giles said. "Hypnosis is not a replacement for medical care. It's something you do to help make the medical care more effective."

On the Net

For information about medical hypnosis, visit the National Institutes of Health Web site at www.nih.gov, the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine Web site at www.nccam.nih.gov, or the National Guild of Hypnotists Web site at www.ngh.net.

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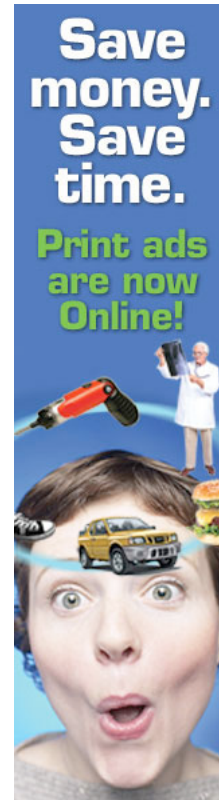
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