

Preaching hypnosis to the ill

Minister helping cancer patients let go of tension

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Like many people with advanced cancer, Diane Scott, 42, is seeking support outside the boundaries of traditional medicine.

"I'm really concerned about quality of life issues," said Scott, who has advanced breast cancer. "With most Stage IV patients, there's not a lot they can offer you."

That's why, on Saturday morning, she attended a free group-hypnosis session offered through the University of Chicago Medical Center and hosted by Fourth Presbyterian Church.

The session was led by the Rev. C. Scot Giles, a certified instructor with the National Guild of Hypnotists and longtime practitioner of hypnosis in the medical setting. The goal was to help cancer patients reduce worry and sadness through hypnotism.

It was just one of the many free or low-cost hypnosis opportunities that Giles -- who says he is one of only a few Chicago-area practitioners to specialize in hypnosis for medical issues -- routinely offers for people living with cancer or other serious conditions.

It may seem unusual for a Christian minister to use hypnosis as a spiritual tool. But Giles says that harnessing the power of the unconscious mind is simply a way to become "the person God created you to be."

"I think hypnosis is a scientific form of healing prayer," he said. "I consider this very much a healing practice of the church."

At the same time, he added, it's not necessary to be Christian, or even religious, to benefit from his services.

On Saturday, he played a music-backed recording of his voice as Scott and her 20 or so fellow attendees sat quietly, eyes shut and headphones on.

Many wore caps or head scarves. Their diagnoses included cancers of the uterus, kidneys, colon and bone marrow.

Beginning by encouraging listeners to imagine themselves in a relaxing meadow scene, Giles' recorded voice issued soothing, upbeat statements about the healing abilities of the body and mind.

Afterward, many appeared so relaxed that they were loath to leave.

"I always know I hit it right when no one wants to get up," Giles told them.

Giles charges only for private consultation, not for the group sessions he offers through the U. of C. as well as through Wellness House in Hinsdale, Wellness Place in Palatine and Little Company of Mary Hospital and Health Care Centers in Evergreen Park.

A similar weekly program he runs at La Grange Memorial Hospital requires a minimal fee.

Giles also offers free hypnotic recordings, both on his Web site as MP3 files and at the group sessions in CD form.

"I'm not in this to make a lot of money," he said. "This is a ministry."

Intrigued by hypnotism since age 10 -- his first experiment consisted of getting his grade-school classmates to sing "The

Star-Spangled Banner" whenever the teacher erased the blackboard, Giles began exploring it professionally during his tenure as senior pastor of Unity Temple in Oak Park from 1981 to 1991.

"I had nine women in my congregation who had breast cancer who asked if I would work with them hypnotically," he said, adding that all subsequently showed improvement in their health.

However, Giles was quick to stress, he doesn't practice medicine. In fact, clients must be referred by their physicians.

"Hypnotism can't reverse the laws of physics," he said. "If the kidney cells are dead, they're dead. I can't bring them back to life."

Nor is he "doing some mystical energy work."

Hypnotism helps in the medical setting, he said, because "people who are more relaxed, eating better, sleeping better, are going to do better with any diagnosis."

He stressed, too, that he does not help people retrieve memories from past lives, make them cluck like chickens or fulfill any of the other popular stereotypes surrounding hypnotism.

Rather, Giles helps clients get in touch with what he calls the unconscious mind's "image of who we're created to be."

"The degree to which our lived experience approximates that image is the degree to which we're happy and strong," he said.

After the group session, Scott said she felt much more relaxed.

Her hope, she said, was that through continued hypnotism, as well as acupuncture and other therapies, "I'll be better able to manage my emotions and my stress." Scott said her doctor's recent estimate was that that she has a life expectancy of six months.

"She's only getting that from a textbook," Scott said. "God didn't send her a message. None of us know how long we have."

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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