

SPECIAL REPORT

insight

A conversation with Dr Jeremy Alford

Learn to relax, relieve stress ... reinforce positive changes

Hypnotherapy can help with many issues

By Chaitali B. Roy

Special to the Arab Times

ANXIETY and stress arising out of an imbalance between our cognitive or conscious belief and the beliefs and desires in our subconscious mind may lead to mental and emotional distress and even physical illness.

Clinical hypnotherapy is a powerful form of Psychotherapy combining cognitive therapeutic counseling techniques with subconscious healing techniques that provide relief from this burden. It helps patients to come into conscious awareness of their subconscious beliefs and desires thus enabling a better understanding of themselves and the redressal of any imbalance resulting in reduced feelings of stress and anxiety.

Arab Times caught up with Dr Jeremy Alford, a Clinical Psychologist, Clinical Hypnotherapist and Neurofeedback Therapist. A consultant in collaboration with the Soor Center in Kuwait, Dr Alford has been in practice since 2003. His work centers around children, adolescents and

Correction

The Insight article published last Monday, June 18, in the Arab Times featuring Nisar Ahmed Sheikh had wrongly mentioned that he was working as a fulltime photographer with the Indian Embassy for 30 years until 2007. Nisar Ahmed Sheikh was only a freelancing photographer for the embassy, and was working fulltime with Kuwait Engineers Office (KEO) during the same period.

adults. As a clinical psychologist, Dr Alford believes in all forms of psychotherapy as each form has something useful to give to the patient. He adopts an eclectic cognitive approach depending on the need of the patient.

In this insightful interview, Dr Alford speaks of different aspects of the practice of hypnotherapy, about stereotypes and prejudices, self-hypnosis and the acceptance of hypnotherapy in the Arab world.

Question: What brought you to hypnotherapy? Why did you decide to learn hypnosis and become a hypnotist and hypnotherapist?

Answer: I have always been curious about the mind and the way we function. The reason why people behave the way they do, what influences them to think and feel in specific ways. This is what initially led me into the field of psychology. After graduating, I decided I wanted to pursue a career in clinical psychology. It was during my training that I found out about a specific course in brief strategic hypnosis and decided to find out more. I was always fascinated by those people I saw on TV called 'hypnotists', and like many of us, I too believed that these people were gifted with some kind of special power. A little like a magician. It wasn't until I got trained myself that I found out all about what it really was, which de-mystified the whole 'I can make you say and do whatever I want' misconception we have.

As a clinical psychologist, I believe in all forms of psychotherapy. Each form has something to give, and each approach allows a person to build insight into their suffering which in turn becomes an opportunity to grow and free oneself from maladapted patterns. This is the reason why I personally adopt an eclectic cognitive approach in my clinical practice as a psychotherapist, and will integrate clinical hypnotherapy, or even neurofeedback therapy, another specialization of mine, when and or if clinically indicated. I will not automatically apply hypnotherapy with every client I see, as some people might be too resistant, therefore, not ready for such an approach, and others might not be clinically indicated for instance people with psychosis. This is the reason why I conduct a thorough evaluation before deciding on the treatment formulation. Clinical hypnotherapy is a specialized therapeutic tool which I may or may not use in my clinical practice.

Q: What is the difference between hypnotherapy and hypnosis?

A: The terms 'hypnotherapy' and 'hypnosis' refer to the same thing as far as the clinical practice is concerned. The difference lies when we talk about the entertainment side of hypnosis. This is typically known as 'Stage hypnosis or hypnotism'. What



Dr Jeremy Alford

biography

Dr Jeremy Alford, MPhil, PhD from the University College Kensington (UK), Clinical Psychologist, Clinical Hypnotherapist & Neurofeedback Therapist. Member of the British Psychological Society, Founder member of the Qualitative Methods in Psychology Section, Founder member of the Special Group for Coaching Psychology and trained at the British Clinical & Strategic Hypnosis Association. Practicing in Lebanon since 2003. Also consulting in Kuwait. Works with children, adolescents and adults.

Specialized in the support and treatment of:

- Eating Disorders and Related Issues (using both Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and Hypnotherapy when or if required)
- Smoking Cessation (with

Disorders Association) which continues to be a work in progress.

Q: Who should seek help from a hypnotherapist?

A: Hypnotherapy can be beneficial for many different issues such as building confidence, relieving stress, developing self-control, building motivation, stop smoking, weight management, phobias such as fear of flying or fear of the dark, panic attacks, obsessions and compulsions, other specific anxieties such as performance anxiety or public speaking as well as many other issues including self acceptance, pain control, tension headaches and other somatization.

Q: What do people typically ask you to help them with when they come to you for hypnosis?

A: All the issues I just mentioned will come to me for hypnotherapy.

Q: Can hypnosis help people overcome self-confidence and other issues?

A: Yes

Q: Can hypnotherapy help in anxiety

Cognitive Hypnotherapy)

■ Mood and Anxiety Disorders (such as Depression, Phobias, Panic Attacks)

■ Compulsive Behaviours (Obsessive Compulsive Disorders, Addictions)

■ Traumas (such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorders, Grief)

■ Learning Difficulties (Attention Deficit Disorders, Hyperactivity, Anger Management, Assertiveness Training)

■ Psychotic Issues (Management of Schizophrenia and other specific issues)

Has been on several TV interviews such as CNN as well as LBC International, Future TV, Hora TV, New TV, Jaras TV, Magazine & Newspapers: Noun, Femme, Mondanite, Fit N Style, Arab Times, Aliwaa, Al Anba'a, Bazaar.

ety and weight loss?

A: Yes, especially when in combination with cognitive therapy. In fact, there are many evidence-based studies today that empirically validate the usefulness of hypnotherapy in a variety of treatments with or without the combination of cognitive behavioural therapy such as anxiety, weight loss, bulimia, insomnia and depression.

Q: What is your approach to doing hypnotherapy? How do you prepare your patients?

A: I will generally use a cognitive approach to my hypnotherapy. I take the time to explain to each client what hypnotherapy is so that they realize that they are active participants in the process. Hypnotherapy is a facilitating agent for the change they are seeking for themselves.

Q: Why do people harbour stereotypes and prejudices when it comes to hypnosis and hypnotherapy?

A: We are all influenced by what we see on TV, and anything 'sensational' will stick to our minds more

easily than anything else. This is the source of such stereotypes as: 'I will be unconscious', or that 'the hypnotist will control my mind', or 'brain-wash me', 'make me say things that I don't want', or 'change my personality' and that 'I will not remember anything when I wake up'. These are all misconceptions.

Q: Is there an age limit to hypnotherapy? Is there an age limit when you can start using hypnotherapy on a person?

A: There are specific techniques that are used with children. When the person is in their teens, it can be practiced in a traditional way where the person will be lying down with their eyes comfortably closed. When it comes to application of these techniques on children it is difficult simply because most children are not always able to stay still with eyes comfortably closed for a fairly long time. So the whole approach is presented very differently.

Q: But you can apply the therapy on all ages?

A: Yes. I would say one can start using it on children aged six or seven.

Q: Would it be right to say that in a way a person loses his free will when he is in a trance? Suppose in normal circumstances I might not have shared the information I do go on to share while going through a hypnosis session?

A: At times we do experience resistance, but the nature of the resistance is also what the work is all about. There might be reasons for this. There may be a part of you which may be creating these obstacles somewhat intentionally.

Q: So suppose a person does not want to go through this, but can you still pull him out — that is what I meant by losing free will?

A: If a person does not want to participate we cannot really do anything apart from just providing the person with more information, a kind of preparing the person for such a process.

Q: A person has to agree to go through the process?

A: Yes, we need the consent of the person to utilize such a technique or approach simply because the person is an active participant in the process.

Q: It is very intriguing but you actually change behavior through repeated sessions — am I right?

A: Yes because we are also working at a cognitive level so therefore we are challenging a person's reasoning, a person's thought, the values a person holds true in a given situation or a given object or whatever it might be and we help the person make certain realizations which will allow him to reframe and restructure the way he is actually behaving or the way he is responding to the environment.

Q: Is he doing it at an unconscious level?

A: There are certain terminologies we need to understand because when a person is under hypnosis, they are not unconscious. They are very alert, very aware of what's going on at different levels and to different degrees. So we have different degrees to the hypnotic process and that can vary from light to medium and to deep. Each level presents with specific sets of physiological changes as well as states of minds.

Q: And how many sessions does a person need?

A: It varies from person to person, but some people get to experience changes just after one session. Some people might need a longer term programme.

Q: Is there any risk involved in this?

A: The only risk is that the initial evaluation is conducted thoroughly or we have skipped other aspects of the person's mental health that could be causing specific problems. I am talking about people who have a history of psychosis or people suffering from specific types of epilepsy, so we need to conduct a complete evaluation. But otherwise there are no side effects to the process of hypnotherapy. In fact anything that comes out from the experience is useful.

Q: Tell us about an interesting case you had recently, if you can.

A: For confidentiality reasons, I am unable to talk about a specific case, however I can say that many people have found renewed hope

through the process of hypnotherapy. Many people I have seen, attempted many other treatment approaches that failed and were pleasantly surprised to experience some level of improvement.

Q: Can anyone be hypnotized?

A: Yes, everyone has the capacity to be hypnotized. In fact, we are all 'hypnotized' everyday without being aware of it. For instance, having a desire to eat sushi without having realized that on that same day you happened to have driven past a billboard with a big sushi ad on it or watching the news on TV and then feeling positive or negative depending on what you were listening to or watching. Again, it is the faulty stereotypes that create a resistance, which explains the reason why some people will block the process or say things such as 'this won't work with me'. This is what we call suggestions. We are all influenced by suggestions all the time. Even the idea that we cannot be hypnotized.

Q: What is self hypnosis and how does it work?

A: Self-hypnosis is a technique that anyone can learn and is similar to meditation. A person can learn self-hypnosis over one or a few sessions. The person might even learn to practice self-hypnosis for a specific purpose tailored to the person him/herself.

Q: What can self-hypnosis be used for?

A: It can be used to relieve stress, learn how to relax, reinforce the positive changes one wants for oneself and develop further confidence.

Q: What does it feel like to be hypnotized?

A: People report feeling very relaxed, being very aware of what is happening, sometimes feeling as if they are floating or on the contrary feeling comfortably heavy, and other people report drifting as if in a dream while being aware at the same time.

Q: Does someone have to believe in hypnosis for it to work?

A: Actually, it is not about believing in it. The only prerequisite is for the person to be well informed about what hypnosis is versus what it is not.

Q: How aware are people in the Arab world?

A: I have been pleasantly surprised by how many people in the Arab world are aware of hypnotherapy or receptive to finding out more about it.

Q: When do people in Kuwait seek hypnotherapy? Are they referred by another doctor?

A: In my experience, I have had people in Kuwait who seek therapy as a last resort, others because they had previously experienced it and it had helped them a lot but haven't had the opportunity to continue since it was carried out in another country and others have sought the approach as first timers in their quest for healing and getting better. They are usually referred to through different sources: either word of mouth or through mental health practitioners, psychotherapists and/or other doctors.

Q: How much would it cost? Is it true that a session can be pretty expensive and that is one reason that people keep away from seeking treatments such as this?

A: The price will vary depending on the professional's experience as well as qualifications. However, if the person is committed to giving themselves a chance to get better, they will actively participate in the process, or at least give themselves an opportunity to know more. If not, the likelihood of them suffering will continue.

Q: You also practice in Lebanon — is there any difference in cases and issues?

A: What I have come to realize in my experience as a clinical psychologist and clinical hypnotherapist is that no matter where I travel to and work, the issues people suffer from across the board and the way in which they attempt to cope are similar, whether it is anxiety, depression, smoking cessation, binge eating, managing weight, fear of flying etc. What is different however, will be cultural.

Q: Any last word on your field of expertise?

A: You will achieve anything you set your mind on. And Milton Erickson once said 'a goal without a date is just a dream'.