

Mind in Medicine

David Corfield

University of Kent

15 November 2023

Albert Mason, [A case of ichthyosiform erythrodermia of Brocq treated by hypnosis](#), BMJ 1952.

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The patient was a boy aged 16 who suffered from congenital ichthyosis. The lesion consisted of a black horny layer covering his entire body except his chest, neck, and face. The skin was papilliferous, each papilla projecting 2-6 mm. above the surface, and the papillae were separated from each other by only a very small distance, perhaps 1 mm. The papillae themselves varied in size from small thread-like projections on the abdomen, back, and flexor surfaces of the arms to large warty excrescences 5 mm. across on the feet, thighs, and palms. The small amount of skin which was visible between the papillae was also black, horny, and fissured. To the touch the skin felt as hard as a normal finger-nail, and was so inelastic that any attempt at bending resulted in a crack in the surface, which would then ooze blood-stained serum. In the skin flexures there were fissures which were constantly being reopened by movement and were chronically infected and painful. The ichthyosiform layer, when cut, was of the consistence of cartilage and was anaesthetic for a depth of several millimetres.

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Treatment by Hypnosis

On February 10, 1951, the patient was hypnotized and, under hypnosis, suggestion was made that the left arm would clear. (The suggestion was limited to the left arm so as to exclude the possibility of spontaneous resolution.)

About five days later the horny layer softened, became friable, and fell off. The skin underneath was slightly erythematous, but normal in texture and colour. From a black and armour-like casing, the skin became pink and soft within a few days. Improvement occurred first in the flexures and areas of friction, and later on the rest of the arm. The erythema faded in a few days. At the end of 10 days the arm was completely clear from shoulder to wrist.

The right arm was treated in the same way (see Figs. 1a and 1b), and ten days later the legs (see Figs. 2a and 2b; 3a and 3b) and trunk were treated.

Result

The improvement shown by the use of this treatment was as follows :

Region	Before Treatment	After Treatment
Hands ..	Completely covered	Palms clear. Fingers not greatly improved
Arms ..	80% covered	95% cleared
Back ..	Covered, but only lightly	90% "
Buttocks ..	Heavily covered	60% "
Thighs ..	Completely and heavily covered	70% "
Legs and feet ..	Completely and heavily covered	50% "

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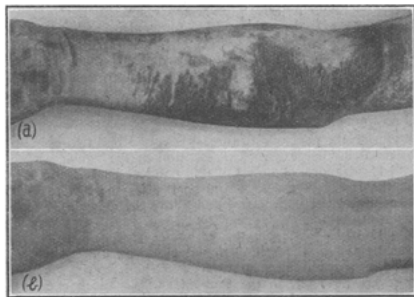


FIG. 1.—Right arm (a) before treatment; (b) eight days after treatment was begun, showing complete regression of ichthyosiform skin. (Left arm shows exactly the same picture.)

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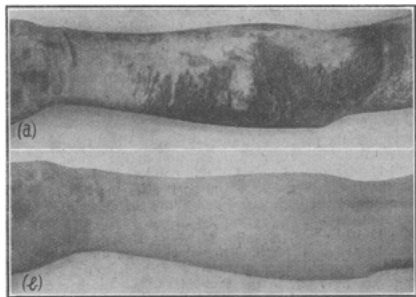


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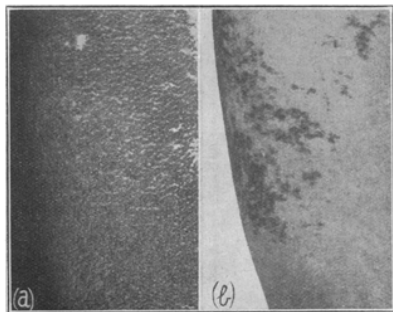


FIG. 3.—Skin of right thigh (a) before treatment; (b) one month after treatment was begun.

Conclusions

From this response to hypnosis one of two inferences may be drawn. Either there is a hitherto unsuspected psychic factor in the aetiology of the disease or this is a case of a congenital organic condition being affected by a psychological process. A combination of both these factors is of course a third possibility. Whichever is true, the improvement in this case seems to be totally unprecedented, and was effected after the failure of all recognized methods of treatment.

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- **Psychoneuroimmunology**

The placebo effect

The *placebo effect* is one place that mind-body effects come into view, but unfortunately largely as the 'noise' to subtract from the 'true signal' of a 'real' therapy

Findings of Benedetti and colleagues

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“The phenomenon of learned placebo responses in neuroendocrine and immune functions is a fascinating example for the communication between the brain, the endocrine, and peripheral immune systems.” (Wendt et al. p. 172)

Benedetti, F. et al. (eds.) 2014. Placebo, Handbook of experimental pharmacology 225, Springer.

Placebo effect recently

- Physiological pathways have been found (Fabrizio Benedetti) (“Words and drugs have the same mechanisms of action” ([article](#)))

Although the responses to the therapist's words cannot be reduced merely to the action of a single drug, this represents an epochal transition, in which the distinction between psychotherapy and pharmacotherapy is progressively getting thinner, and which helps us overcome the old dichotomy between psychology and biology.

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- Studies have been conducted on differential power of components of the doctor's manner and open placebos (Ted Kaptchuk)
- But by reducing the role of the mind on health to this general and overt level, largely relying on conditioning and expectancy, we might worry that something has been missed.

Nomothetic studies

A. Skrabski, M. Kopp and I. Kawachi, 'Social Capital and Collective Efficacy in Hungary', *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 57 (2003), pp. 114–19.

A recent study from the Harvard Center for Society and Health of 12,643 subjects found that those who had what they called a 'rival' attitude had a higher risk factor for mortality than that given by smoking. Distrust and jealousy were the biggest killer, especially for men, and the best protective factor was neighbourhood cohesion.

Idiographic studies

- Older idiographic work in the “**psychosomatic**” tradition
- Continued by, e.g., Nick Read in *Sick and Tired*, return of gastroenterological symptoms determined by psychological state as revealed in therapy.

Idiographic study

Here's a Jungian:

The patient had a deep maternal wound. At the age of 14 she had discovered that she was the daughter of her mother's lover. However, she recollected that even as a very small child she had noticed her mother's affairs. She was always terrified that her "lawful" father would discover them and murder her mother, because he had a violent personality. Her mother had forced her to be her silent accomplice, a fact that was hard for her to reveal even in analysis.

She refused to get married but had many affairs, always breaking up the relationship upon falling in love with another man. Usually she got interested in married men until she succeeded in getting them to wreck their marriages.

During the analysis we were able to work with her hatred of men and of her mother. She had a strong, seductive defense mechanism and, at the same time, identified strongly with her mother.

During an acute migraine incident, I asked her to close her eyes and increase the pain in her head.

Denise Ramos - *The Psyche of the Body: A Jungian Approach to Psychosomatic Illness* (Verso, 2004)

Helen grew redder and redder, and the veins on her forehead became very prominent. Suddenly she opened her startled eyes, saying:

I was in a village, being judged in a public square. Someone squeezed my head with a tourniquet to make me confess my guilt.

Helen returns to the torture scene and screams to all that she is not guilty. But she rids herself of the tourniquet only when she denounces the truly guilty party: her mother. As she does so, to my

surprise, the color of her skin returns to normal and the patient attains complete and immediate relief from her migraine.

Of course, the migraine returns in a few days. But, after she confesses other “guilt” feelings, her symptoms gradually fade until they disappear completely.

New biology - new medicine

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- Levin sees ‘mind’ or intelligence as much more widely dispersed than in animal brains, e.g., through subsystems of the body.
- The specificity of the hypnotic suggestion from Mason targeting a single place on the body – left arm, right leg, etc. – suggests a supra-cellular know-how.

The medicine of the future?

THE BIGGER PICTURE Disorders ranging across drug addiction, injury, and cancer have proven difficult to definitively repair by focusing on the molecular hardware inside cells. Drug design and genomic editing face fundamental limitations of context, complexity, and cellular resistance. Fortunately, computer science and behavioral science are beginning to point the way to a transformative regenerative medicine in which pharmaceutical efforts focused on molecules will be complemented by top-down approaches that exploit the collective intelligence of cells and the native control mechanisms that establish form and function.

Powerful methods of controlling complex body systems include taking advantage of their newly discovered cognitive properties: memory, problem solving, and reprogrammability. Emerging advances in placebo research, non-neural bioelectric networks, and the diverse intelligence of cells, tissues, and organs suggest that the medicine of the future may look more like a kind of somatic psychiatry than chemistry or genetics. Therapeutic interventions will communicate and behavior-shape body processes, exploiting the software of life for novel solutions to disease, injury, and aging.

Levin et al., Cellular signaling pathways as plastic, proto-cognitive systems: Implications for biomedicine

Thank you for listening!