

# ASK THE PROFESSIONAL



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## Therapeutic Hypnosis with Dental Phobia

by: *Brice Lemaire*

**IACT:** Thank you for granting this interview. Let's begin with an overview of your educational qualifications in this area.

**BL:** I received my PhD in Dental Surgery in 1996, and started my dental liberal practice.

Our study at the Dental University didn't prepare the practitioners for a therapeutic relationship with patients. I understood quite soon at the office, that 90% of the patients were afraid of the dentist, which is a natural reaction because the mouth is an emotional part of our body. When I was presented with dental phobia, I soon realized that I needed to increase my competence in a psychological approach of my patient.

So I started learning hypnosis, first from an Ericksonian school, but the skills were not adapted to my practice. Then I had the chance of my life to make a seminar with Ormond McGill. I caught what we call the hypnotic fever and Ormond oriented me to Elmanian hypnosis. Over the last 20 years, I've attended various trainings in hypnosis with Jerry Kein, John Butler, Larry Elman, and in NLP with Richard Bandler, Robert Dilts, and so on....



**Brice Lemaire**

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1996 Phd in Dental Surgery  
 2002. Introduction of hypnosis at the dental office.  
 2017 Creation of the Postgraduate Dental Hypnosis at the Dental University of Nice (France).  
 2017 Instructor of the Postgraduate Dental Hypnosis at the Dental University of Nice (France).  
 Expert credentials Certified Instructor in Elmanian Hypnosis by Dave Elman Hypnosis Institute (Larry Elman).

In 2017, I created the Postgraduate Dental Hypnosis to teach dental hypnosis at the Dental University of Nice (France). All the hypnosis sessions are filmed at the office (20 years), so it makes a database (more than 9000 hypnosis) for research in hypnosis with thesis made by students.

I also wrote "Dental Hypnosis: Operative & Therapeutic" in 2018. Another book will be published in a few months "History of hypnosis" 800 pages in French....

In 2020, I became an instructor for the Dave Elman Hypnosis Institute with the Elman's and created the Dave Elman Hypnosis Institut France to promote Elmanian Medical Hypnosis in my country. I made many lectures for congress: Hypnozекongress, Hypnodontics summit, Dave Elman Legacy, Hypnosummit, and so on...

I started the IMDHA Virtual Chapter in France, a Zoom session every month, about specific topics in hypnosis.

Actually, in my daily practice at the office, I make hypnosis for operative or therapeutic purpose. Operative hypnosis consists of making dental treatment in hypnosis and managing hypno-sedation, hypno-anesthesia, and also acute and chronic pain.

Therapeutic hypnosis is very useful in the dental field: smoking cessation, bruxism, eating disorder, nail biting, stress, anxiety and phobia.

In fact, in the field of dental hypnosis, we find all the applications of hypnosis! Dental phobia is a fascinating topic in hypnosis because it shows us the power of negative imagination over the body and the mind. When we switch it into a positive way with hypnosis , we can make great changes and for the benefit of our patients.

These are my expert credentials :

Founder of the Dave Elman Hypnosis Institute France

Certified Instructor in Elmanian Hypnosis by Dave Elman Hypnosis Institute (Larry Elman)

Certified Hypnotherapist by Hypnotherapy Training Institute (Ormond Mc Gill)

Certified in Medical Hypnotherapy by Hypnotherapy Training International (John Butler)

Certified Hypnotherapist by National Guild of Hypnosis (NGH)

Certified Hypnotherapist by International Medical and Dental Hypnotherapy Association (IMDHA) Founder of the Virtual Chapter France IMDHA "Hénin de Cuvillers"

Certified Hypnotherapist by Omni Hypnosis (Jerry Kein)

Licensed Master Practitioner by NLP Life Training (Richard Bandler)

Licensed Master Practitioner by NLP (Robert Dilts)

**IACT: What is the hypnotic process by which you address someone presenting dental phobia?**

**BL:** "First of all you must establish a good rapport with the patient; Meaning a good communication that leads to a therapeutic alliance. A therapeutic alliance is obtained when you gain mutual trust in the practitioner and treatment.

Hypnosis is the most powerful tool in interpersonal and also intrapersonal levels.

Since the patient give a call for a rendezvous, the assistant is trained in conversational hypnosis to reassure the patient. The semantics are particularly important, as Dave Elman said, so no words are painted with pain or fear....

Then when we welcome the patient for the first time during the medical questionnaire, we are very attentive to the non verbal, para verbal, and verbal communication which represent all the signs that indicate anxiety, stress, fear, phobia. We already give a lot of suggestions in conversational hypnosis and evaluate the reaction of the patient. Then concerning the fearful patient, we must arrive at a precise diagnosis between fear and phobia.

I always keep it pragmatic, meaning my theory comes from my practice. So I keep it simple, simple but not easy!

Fear is when you have physiological and psychological signs and symptoms when you are in a fearful situation. Phobia is when you have physiological and psychological signs and symptoms when you are just imagining a fearful situation.

So phobia is the fear of the fear! - the power of our negative imagination.

In that case, my response to the patient is "You're lucky, you have an imaginary problem...and we have the most powerful technique, an imaginary solution".

Usually phobic patients are the best patients for hypnosis. They have such a wonderful negative imagination and our job is to switch it in a positive way.

In the first session of treatment we do an oral examination, x rays and so on.

The second session is dedicated to a hypnotherapeutic session, in a quiet room, not in the dental room. According to your kind of hypnosis and your training, you can use many techniques to cure a phobia. As an Elmanian hypnosis, I use hypno-analysis with HRT (Hypnotic Regression Therapy). It provides me with the best results in one session of deep trance (usually 2 hours).

Regression is interesting when the cause is not known consciously. Usually the cause of dental phobia is well known consciously. The patient remembers the (ise) initial sensitizing event. The point of HRT is to desensitize the emotion and to reframe the behaviour linked to that specific event.



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At the end of this session, we always give positive suggestions (ego strengthening) and also create an anchor to teach the patient self hypnosis in order to come back to the office with positive results. Then the following sessions of dental treatments are conducted with operative hypnosis: instant or fast inductions, deepening techniques, tests for level of trance, deep stuporous trance or deep somnambulistic trance according to the need of the treatment, dental treatment with positive suggestions, emerge.

As hypnosis is learned, we explain that, like riding a bike, each time, they will go further and faster in trance. So in our dental treatment, we start with the easiest to the most complex procedure in order to have a very deep trance when the dental work is more complicated, long, and/or surgical. By making small positive emotional successes, the patient feels comfortable with the hypnotic experience and dental treatment can be done in a completely relaxed state. It's important that they always feel safe and secure and that we are comfortable with each other.

This is our strategy for our phobic patient. After 20 years of experience, I would say that it works in 95% of the phobic cases.

For the 5% who are not successful: If the patient comes at the beginning of dental treatment still presenting fear and major anxiety, we suggest another therapeutic session in hypnosis to reinforce the first session and use other strategies (parts therapy, guided imagery, NLP, and so on...)."

### **IACT: What studies and research can you reference in regard to dental hypnosis and phobia?**

**BL:** In fact, we must understand that dental phobia is a phobia like any phobia. So the work of our predecessors in medical hypnosis like Elman, Erickson, Hartland, Kroger, Meares, Cheek, Ewin, and so on...is still valid and must be studied in order to have various strategies in hypno analysis to cure phobia.

But dental field is specific because the mouth may be one of the most emotional part of our body linked to many functions: talking, eating, kissing, smiling, and so on... So the cognitive and emotional implications of that zone help us to understand more how dental patients can have intense phobia.

Some phobic patients come to me for treatment with hypnosis and sometimes just waiting for me in the waiting room, they faint and collapse. There again we measure the power of negative imagination and how a negative trance affects the mind and body with the activation of the nervous sympathetic system.

The dental surgeons who have practiced hypnosis since the 40's in England and in the USA understood it perfectly and developed a lot of techniques for the fearful patient. The first was Stolzenberg in 1950 with "Psychosomatics and Suggestion Therapy in Dentistry". Then Moss with "Hypnodontics" in 1952, certainly one of the most useful books and then Shawn in 1958 with "Clinical Applications of Hypnosis in Dentistry". These are the pioneers that open the field to hypnosis in dentistry.

More recently we have Burrows in 2001 with "International Handbook of Clinical Hypnosis", then Simons in 2007 who published "Hypnosis And Communication In Dental Practice" and the excellent book of Beryl Comar "Hypndontics" in 2016.

As a teacher at the Dental university in Nice, I also published (in French) "Hypnose Dentaire" in 2018, and wrote articles about that subject. Some of my students also made their Thesis for Phd graduation, under my supervision about Elmanian hypnosis in dentistry: pain management, stress and phobia, self hypnosis, and so on.

*just  
breathe*

*The natural rhythm of inhalation and exhalation promotes rhythmic micro movement in the body which helps release tension, promotes blood circulation, stimulates the flow of spinal fluid (an important factor in the communication between body and brain) and makes all sorts of body movements more efficient. So... 'just breathe'.*

Research and studies are still running since the 2000:

- "Hypnosis with a blind 55 year old female with dental phobia" Michaël Gow in 2006 (Contemporary Hypnosis)
- "The partial reformulation of a traumatic memory of a dental phobia during trance: A case study" Sheldon R. Baker in 2008 (International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis)
- "A Practice-Based Comparison of Brief Cognitive Behavioural Treatment, Two Kinds of Hypnosis and General Anaesthesia in Dental Phobia" André Wannemueller in 2011 (Psychotherapy and psychosomatics)
- "Etiology and Treatment of Dental Anxiety and Phobia" Dr. Emil R. Rodolfa in 2011 (American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis)
- "Application of Hypno-Dissociative Strategies During Dental Treatment of Patients With Severe Dental Phobia" Joseph Meyerson in 2014 (International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis)

More recently, Juan Accosta, also wrote an excellent book "Hypnodontics" in 2016 and organized the first Hypnodontics Summit last year. Sharon Waxkirsh, one of the most brilliant hypnotherapists and I, made a lecture at this congress. Actually, I got the feeling that the hypnotherapy profession is re-discovering the interest of hypnosis in the field of dentistry.

It's such a good thing for everyone: the patient, the hypnotherapist and the dentist.

**IACT: We all like a good story. Do you have a case study you'd like to share with our readers?**

**BL:** With more than 9000 hypnosis sessions in our dental office since 20 years, all filmed for medical purposes and research, we have a lot of incredible stories about trance. More specifically linked to the topic of dental phobia, a good story...

A 35 years old man was so phobic that, the first time I saw him and went into the waiting room, he fainted.... It was not an instant induction, just his extreme fear! Same scenario, in the Xray room, so for a first appointment at the dental office, he was what we could call a severe case of phobia. After 2 hypnotherapeutic sessions, he felt fine to start treatment with hypnosis.

And little by little, as he increased the depth of his trance, (after 4 or 5 dental sessions of treatment) he gained confidence.

Then came the day of the surgical procedure for implant therapy; and the patient said to me "I don't need hypnosis anymore, I feel ok". He went into a superb self hypnosis trance and reached the Esdaile state so deeply that we could manage the whole procedure in hypno-anesthesia, without any chemical anesthesia.

This story illustrates two facts:

First, hypnosis is a learning process, and the patient goes faster and deeper in trance every time he enters the hypnotic state.

Second, all our props (the office, the dental chair, our voice, the induction, and so on...) are very powerful anchors for trance. The induction is just the first accepted suggestion by the patient to go in trance. So when we create the right timing with the right environment, the patient goes into trance by himself, because all hypnosis is self hypnosis, as Tebbetts and Elman wrote.

**IACT: Thank you for sharing that story. Is there anything we should know about Dental Phobia that hasn't been covered?**

**BL:** Phobic patients are perhaps the patients for whom we receive the most human and professional gratification. They become loyal and grateful patients for life and refer many patients to us. We have changed their feelings about medical treatment and they can now be treated in comfort and relaxation.

A treated phobic patient who was so busy with her family and professional activities gave me the highest compliment when she said, "This office has become the only place in the week where I can relax."

It changes their life experience, creates new learning, but it goes far beyond a simple paradigm shift. They now know that if they have overcome their greatest fear, they can now put many of the fears in their lives into perspective. And they can regain their self-confidence by accessing all their resources through hypnosis.

**IACT: Thank you for your time. We look forward to learning more about this subject in the near future.**