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NEIGHBORS, FAMILY HEALTH AND BETTER LIVING

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Hypnotist Eleanor Laser talks to Michel Muller as she helps him enter a hypnotic state. Laser worked with Muller earlier this year to help him get through extensive cancer surgery.

Geoff Scheerer/Pictorial Press

Hypnotist applies skills to health

By **NICK KATZ**
STAFF WRITER

Eleanor Laser's files are filled with letters from patients who have quit smoking, lost weight, gone through a fairly painless childbirth and even undergone rapid surgical recovery with little pain.

Laser, a Lincolnwood hypnotist, has worked with those kinds of problems and more during her more than two decades in the field.

An expert in using hypnosis for surgery, she has trained staff members at the University of Iowa Hospital. With a doctor there, she developed a training video to help others use her techniques of surgical hypnosis. And more recently she began working with the staff at Rush North Shore Medical Center in Skokie.

"Hypnosis is a way to go inside the mind and adjust a problem in the body," Laser said. "Hypnosis is not sleep. It's just an altered state of consciousness."

When people think of hypnosis, some picture a person clucking like a chicken every time the phone rings. But Laser said everyone enters a hypnotic state sometimes.

"Anytime we do anything by rote,

we're in hypnosis. We're in and out of it all day," she said. "It's a myth people think they can't come out of it. It's just that it's so comfortable, why bother."

Laser became interested in weight control, the subject of her doctoral dissertation, through an aunt who was dying of obesity.

"She came to visit, but she couldn't breathe and couldn't walk through the house," Laser said. Talking with her aunt, Laser learned that as a child she had gotten attention through food.

"I started to talk about it with her and somehow this had an impact on her," Laser said. "She started to lose weight."

"I began to research early memories. I had to learn how to collect those early recollections in a way the person would feel things were in there and I wouldn't be responsible for interpreting them."

When Laser treats someone for obesity, she first helps them find the reason for their overeating.

Often, she said, it is some event or trauma that occurred during childhood. "Patterns begin before age 5," she said.

Through hypnosis, she said, "they go into the experience. They see it right away," she said. "I really work

with symptoms. I ask them where the symptom resides in their body. It's hard to understand."

Once the pattern is identified, though, Laser said she still must help a patient find a way to change it without becoming controlled by the memory itself.

Shift patterns

"It's one thing to understand it. It's another thing to shift it," Laser said. "Shifting and interrupting of patterns is what I specialize in."

"I change the focus of the memory, the meaning of it," Laser said. "Everyone has a trauma. They remember it in a way that doesn't bother them."

Laser invented a technique she calls "hypnotizing the hypothalamus," the gland that controls appetite. The person, she said, in effect calls on the hypothalamus to help in the weight loss effort.

"They (patients) feel they're not alone anymore in the struggle. They have an inner buddy to help them," Laser said.

"There's a committee inside each one of us that runs us. The inner committee. All those parts have to come together. Thinking of the

hypothalamus helps us shift."

Laser, thin herself, said she has used the technique to control her own eating.

"My parents were both overweight. I always dwell on food. I'd go into the grocery store day and night. Eating is a form of keeping yourself busy, giving yourself attention, like a child demanding attention," she said.

"When I call up the hypothalamus, it starts crying if I'm eating potato chips or something," she said. "I can't guarantee it will help with every person, but when it works it's a miracle."

In the last few years, Laser has become more involved with hypnosis for surgery and other medical treatments. While hypnosis may not be used in place of anesthesia for most patients, it can help prepare them for surgery, reduce the amount of anesthesia needed, reduce or eliminate post operative pain and shorten recovery time, she said.

That was a major benefit for Michel Muller, a Highland Park auto dealer.

Last year Muller was scheduled to undergo a second round of dental implants and was worried because the first time he had suffered extensive pain. Laser hypnotized him before the second implant and there

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was a major difference, Muller said.

"She said she could possibly preclude any pain. I had minimal pain," Muller said. The time before I had horrendous pain."

In April of this year Muller turned to Laser again when he underwent "very extensive" cancer surgery at Northwestern University Hospital.

Muller had seven sessions of hypnosis prior to surgery to prepare him for both the surgery itself and his recovery. During the surgery, he wore earphones so he could listen to a hypnosis tape Laser had prepared for him.

"She was there right along

‘She was there right along with me. My vital signs for 10 hours were stable.’

with me," Muller said. "My vital signs for 10 hours were stable.

"It was very relaxing and very reassuring. The anesthesiologist was amazed at how steady I was during the surgery. I had no post-operative discomfort, no pain at all."

Laser said hypnosis can be used both in place of anesthesia or in conjunction with it to speed recovery and keep patients relaxed and stable during the procedure.

Staying calm

"If the patient is calm, they need a little anesthesia. If they're anxious they need to keep pumping it in. It's like day and night," Laser said.

Laser has performed training in non-pharmacological analgesia, the use of hypnosis for surgery, at the University of Iowa Hospital. She also has made presentations to the Chicago Society of Clinical Hypnosis, Rush Medical School, Purdue University and other groups.

But what she would like to do more of is actual training of doctors and other staff at hospitals.

"I would like to get work training departments at hospitals," she said.

"Hypnosis is very cost effective. It reduces recovery time.

"It makes patients part of the team. If you make them feel it's really part of a team effort, they really go forward."

For more information on Laser's hypnotism programs call 677-7334.