

Pediatrician sees results in hypnosis

By SUE REID

Bainbridge pediatrician Dr. Jeffrey Lazarus has a message to share.

As one of only 13 physicians nationwide certified as senior consultants in clinical hypnosis for children and adolescents by the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis, he said, he has helped guide his patients to overcome a variety of conditions without the use of medication for the past seven years.

He wants to teach young people to empower themselves through self-hypnosis, he said. "I want to spread the word as Johnny Appleseed planted those seeds," said Dr. Lazarus, who lectures across the country on the technique.

"What's incredible about the clinical hypnosis is that 20 percent of families are suffering with children who have problems such as bed-wetting, test anxiety, sports performance and warts." In teaching the technique of self-hypnosis, 85 percent of children and adolescents have found it remedies these conditions, he said. "It is extremely exciting."

Examples of other conditions young people can overcome through the application of clinical self-hypnosis include migraine headaches, tics and Tourette Syndrome, he said.

"Every child and every person is powerful," Dr. Lazarus said. "By harnessing the power of the mind, we are able to do things we never thought we could do."

He teaches self-hypnosis in Beachwood, in addition to his practice in general pediatrics at the University Hospitals facility in Bainbridge.

In Beachwood, he screens each of his patients carefully before actually teaching self-hypnosis, spending nearly an hour just talking, Dr. Lazarus said. "I talk to patients and their families to see if I'm the right fit for them."

Sometimes, parents are hesitant, he said. "It's up to me to educate them. They hear the word hypnosis, and they think of the swinging watch," he said.

"With trances with hypnotherapy, people are conscience and awake, and there are conversations going back and forth," Dr. Lazarus said. "No one can control anyone else. Therefore, all hypnosis is self-hypnosis. I can teach patients to hypnotize themselves."

Children are much better than adults in entering a "trance" state, he said. "Kids use their imaginations all the time. They are more trusting and have less armor and baggage."

Dr. Lazarus noted that clinical hypnosis only works if a child is motivated. "If you're a 5 year old with migraines that cause you to have a bad headache and be miserable all day, you're more motivated," he said. "It does not matter how old a child is."

He uses guided imagery with a positive outcome, he said. "It's so empowering for children to take over their body and life challenges, as well as empowering and rewarding for me. It's not just a temporary pill but a lifetime skill."

Dr. Lazarus' own motivation in learning the technique came from a personal experience, he said. "I had plantar warts and visited a dermatologist regularly." The warts were burned and frozen, and he had to put medication on them, he said. "After seeing my dermatologist every three weeks for 15 months, they were still there."

He remembered the story of a 5-year-old-boy who had hundreds of warts on the backs of his hands, Dr. Lazarus said. "They were quite disfiguring." The child went to a dermatologist and then to a surgeon, he said. But it was one session of hypnotherapy that did the trick, he said.

Dr. Karen Olness, a pediatric hypnotherapist at Rainbow Babies and Children's Hospital who co-authored a book on the technique with Dr. Daniel Kohen, agreed to see Dr. Lazarus, he said.

"She taught me the technique of self-hypnosis, including deep muscle relaxation, muscle group by muscle group.



Photo by Itamar Gat

Dr. Jeffrey Lazarus teaches self-hypnosis to help young people overcome a variety of conditions without the use of medication.

When your body is relaxed, your mind is open."

He said it took 45 minutes to enter into his first trance. When he reached that special place, he told himself to no longer feed the warts, he said. Dr. Olness told him to do the exercise for 10 minutes twice a day and call her in a month.

"I did the exercise and actually visualized the blood vessels constricting," Dr. Lazarus said. "I felt tingling. All my M.D. friends were laughing at me." But three weeks later, they were gone and never came back, he said.

"I said to myself, this is remarkable. I have to learn to do this and teach this to kids." Overcoming their challenges builds children's self-confidence, he said. "It can pour over into other parts of their life," Dr. Lazarus said.

"The beauty of self-hypnosis is that there is no medicine and, therefore, no side effects."

With such problems with tics and Tourette Syndrome, "a lot of medications are used, and often they don't work and have significant side effects," Dr. Lazarus said.

He has special interest in treating such disorders through self-hypnosis, he said. "I love taking care of kids with tics and Tourette Syndrome." While a condition like bed-wetting is more private, tics, which involve involuntary movements coupled with jerking, and Tourette, which couples both tics and vocalization, are socially unacceptable, he said.

"When I can take a child with tics and teach him or her to control it, that's the most rewarding thing I can do. It improves the quality of their life."

Working in the field of clinical hypnosis has made him a much better listener, doctor and friend, said Dr. Lazarus, who has practiced pediatric medicine for 25 years. "The language is a very specialized language, and the training is very unique."

To become certified in the field, Dr. Lazarus spent a great deal of time completing workshops offered throughout the country by the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis, he said. "It's a very time-consuming technique to learn and very time intensive to take care of patients."

A resident of Shaker Heights, Dr. Lazarus received his medical degree from Rush Medical College in Chicago and did his internship and residency in pediatrics at Stanford University in California.

He is a member of the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis and the Cleveland Society of Clinical Hypnosis and a fellow with the American Academy of Pediatrics. He is an associate clinical professor at Rainbow Babies and Children's Hospital, as well as Hillcrest and Marymount hospitals.