

# Hypnotherapy may offer real benefits for cancer patient care

July 2 2024

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Hypnotherapy could offer a host of benefits to cancer patients; however, a [recent study](#) published in *Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice* from Edith Cowan University (ECU) has highlighted the need for more

education in the area.

"Hypnotherapy in a [clinical setting](#) looks entirely different than when done for an audience as entertainment. For clinical use, hypnotherapy is a very mental process that entails a hypnotherapist speaking to a patient. It is really very similar to meditation," ECU Ph.D. student Malwina Szmaglinska explained.

For cancer patients, hypnotherapy could offer a host of benefits, including managing nausea, pain, anxiety, depression and increasing the quality of life.

"Hypnotherapy is very non-threatening and non-invasive, and it has no side effects. It can be delivered in a range of methods, from recorded sessions for individual use, group sessions that offer collective experiences, or customized one-on-one sessions tailored to address specific patient symptoms," said Szmaglinska.

She noted that hypnotherapy also empowers patients by teaching them skills such as self-hypnosis, facilitating symptom management and improvement in overall well-being.

Cancer remains a leading cause of death in Australia. The number of new cancer cases diagnosed each year is expected to surpass 200,000 by 2033.

This marks a significant increase from about 88,000 cases in 2000 to an estimated 165,000 cases in 2023. Despite advancements in treatment, emotional and psychological challenges in cancer care are often overlooked.

## **Hypnotherapy—a treatment alternative**

While contemporary cancer treatments have contributed to increased [survival rates](#), they are often accompanied by negative side effects including nausea, fatigue, and diminished quality of life. The cancer journey also involves emotional and psychological challenges, such as depression and anxiety, which substantially affect quality of life, adherence to treatment, and overall survival outcomes.

"There is a largely untapped potential not only to improve patient quality of life, but also to influence disease progression in a positive manner by more effectively addressing psychosocial dimensions of care.

"Complementary and [alternative medicine](#) (CAM) usage among adult cancer patients is both widespread and increasing, with up to 87% reported to engage with at least one CAM therapy postdiagnosis."

Szmaglinska claims that despite the effectiveness of hypnotherapy in the management of complex symptomatology associated with cancer, and inclusion in the list of effective mind-body techniques by Cancer Council Australia, hypnotherapy is not widely used in cancer care.

"In addition to a lack of education around hypnotherapy, the treatment is also quite expensive. While counseling and psychology sessions are often covered by Medicare, hypnotherapy is not.

"Conversely, hypnotherapy is often cheaper than counseling or psychology, and you would commonly require fewer sessions. But because it is not covered by Medicare, it is a big capital outlay, especially if patients are going through quite expensive treatments."

Future studies will investigate the [knowledge gaps](#), attitudes, and possible misconceptions among health care providers that could act as obstacles to the broader adoption of hypnotherapy as a complementary treatment in cancer care.

"Understanding these barriers is critical for developing interventions that could facilitate the integration of [hypnotherapy](#) into standard cancer [treatment](#) protocols," said Szmaglinska.

**More information:** Malwina Szmaglinska et al, Beyond standard treatment: A qualitative descriptive study of cancer patients' perceptions of hypnotherapy in cancer care, *Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice* (2024). [DOI: 10.1016/j.ctcp.2024.101861](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ctcp.2024.101861)

Provided by Edith Cowan University

Citation: Hypnotherapy may offer real benefits for cancer patient care (2024, July 2) retrieved 2 July 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-07-hypnotherapy-real-benefits-cancer-patient.html>

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