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Hypnosis eases pain, anxiety, Montreal Children's Hospital pilot project shows

In a Quebec first, more than 120 patients have been hypnotized, sparing the children sedation and even general anesthesia in some cases.

[Aaron Derfel, Montreal Gazette](#)

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Maryanne Fortin sat next to her patient, nine-year-old Koraly Lefrançois, who had already closed her eyes. The hypnosis was about to begin.

“Let the calmness grow inside you,” Fortin suggested, speaking in a monotone. “Let go of all your other feelings.”

Koraly, who is in remission from a rare type of Hodgkin lymphoma, soon drifted into a reverie. Although she was lying on a bed in the [Montreal Children's Hospital](#), in Koraly's mind she was petting lions while on a safari.

Koraly's mother stared at her daughter's face, framed in short blond hair that was beginning to grow back after chemotherapy. The girl's eyes moved rapidly under her eyelids.

“She looks like an angel,” Anne Zeestraten said of her daughter.

Twenty minutes later, Koraly was no longer under a hypnotic spell. She looked a little groggy at first, but her eyes soon twinkled with delight.

“I liked it a lot,” Koraly said of being hypnotized on Thursday morning. “It's very relaxing.”

Koraly is among more than 120 children and teens who have undergone medical hypnosis at the Montreal Children's this year under a pilot project aimed at easing their pain and anxiety before certain procedures, like installing an intravenous line or draining an abscess.

In Koraly's case, she didn't require anesthesia before a doctor performed a biopsy on her in May to diagnose her lymphoma. Instead, Koraly was imagining riding a roller-coaster in an amusement park after being hypnotized by Fortin.

When Koraly had to return to the Children's to have a PICC line installed through her arm and into her heart to deliver antibiotics, she didn't need to be sedated first. Instead, she was on an ocean cruise during a hypnotic journey.

The Children's is the first hospital in Quebec to adopt medical hypnosis. Four medical-imaging technologists, including Fortin and Vicky Fortin (no relation), were trained in hypnosis in January for use in interventional radiology.

Results from the pilot project have shown that patients who were hypnotized prior to a medical procedure rated their discomfort afterward at 1.4 on a scale of zero to 10, compared with an average of 5.4 in children who did not undergo hypnosis.

"It's a big thing for the patients," Vicky Fortin said. "There are some cases that would have required sedation. But with hypnosis, we were able to do the patients the same day when they needed it."



"The advantages are that now they don't move. They're quiet and they're not anxious," Fortin added.

Using medical hypnosis also saves the hospital the extra time and expense of calling in an anesthesiologist and having the child recover in a post-anesthesia care unit.

Zeestraten, who lives on the South Shore, said Koraly doesn't associate the hospital with pain and anxiety thanks to hypnosis.

“I’m very happy that Koraly had a chance to do it because I think it’s a very, very good alternative to sedation,” she said. “It’s gone well. You don’t have to hear any crying with the needles.”

The Children’s embarked on the pilot project after being approached last year by Quebec’s professional order of medical-imaging technologists. In January, Claire Benoit-Ruby, a radiology technologist and hypnotherapist from Lyon, France, travelled to Montreal to train the team at the Children’s over a seven-day period.

For now, medical hypnosis is being used only in interventional radiology, but there are hopes that it could eventually be expanded to other departments at the Children’s.

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