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**Somerset nurse's study to prove benefits of hypnosis after colectomy**

4th October

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Ana-Maria Toth *(Image: NHS Somerset Trust)*

A CLINICAL nurse researcher at Somerset NHS Foundation Trust has launched an exciting study to test whether hypnosis could benefit patients after a colectomy.

Ana-Maria Toth is aiming to recruit at least 40 patients to receive hypnosis while they’re recovering from surgery, to check whether it helps with their pain and overall recovery.

Ana previously worked on Musgrove Park Hospital’s gastroenterology ward, before moving to a surgical ward, where she began to look at different ways of managing people’s pain in the days after surgery.

She said: “The idea of my study began while I was working as a junior sister on the colorectal surgery ward – Montacute ward – as I identified a few things that I felt might help with people’s pain after surgery, particularly after a colorectal procedure.”

“The current management for peri-operative pain is multi-modal analgesia (a combination of medicines), including opioids, which are widely used, but not well tolerated due to their numerous adverse effects.

“Pain management after an operation can be different for each individual patient, and we’re always looking for ways to control pain, which makes it easier for patients to get up and about and get back to normal food and drink intake – we’re keen to find out the extent to which hypnosis could help with this.

“It prompted me to think about whether there was something else we could offer our patients that doesn’t involve medication, so I started researching hypnosis and I saw that it had been used elsewhere, in breast surgery and for patients recovering from burns.

“I then undertook an undergraduate degree in medical hypnosis at the University of Birmingham in my spare time, and I was joined by a range of other healthcare professionals across the country, including GPs, dentists, anaesthetists, and nurses.

“I achieved my diploma and started to think about how I could bring my practice into the NHS through a potential research study.

“I applied for a grant through one of our trust charities, Love Musgrove, which agreed to fund my part in the study.

“My research project is called Hypnopal, which looks at how we can use hypnosis to help with pain after a patient has had a colectomy operation.

“The main focus is on pain, but it also looks at patients’ recovery, their length of stay in hospital, how fast they mobilise, and get back to eating and drinking.

“Hypnopal began in July 2023 and will look at 40 patients over the course of a year – I’ve already recruited a handful of patients so far, which is great news.

“I take part in patients’ multidisciplinary team meetings with our consultant surgeons and other professionals, such as radiologists and oncologists, every Monday when they discuss upcoming cases of surgery.

“Then I screen patients from the surgery lists, and I go into the clinics with the surgeons, who tell me about the care and treatment plan for each patient, including other treatments they might need.

“At the same time, they mention the Hypnopal study to each patient and ask whether they’d like to take part.

“I send them an information pack, giving them time to read up about it, and then three days later I’ll call them to see if they’d be interested in joining the study.

“If they’re happy to take part then we’ll have an initial consultation and a computer randomisation process will choose whether the patient is assigned into a ‘control group’ or an ‘intervention group’.

“The intervention group offers hypnosis on top of the standard care, which is all the regular care they’d normally get. Patients in the ‘control group’ just receive regular care without hypnosis.

“For patients allocated to the intervention group, the first hypnosis session will be offered at our first consultation.

“I will see them again 24 hours after their operation, when they’ll have a second hypnosis session, and a third hypnosis session will be offered three days after surgery.

“Then I follow up with the patient on the day they leave the hospital, as well as 10 days later.

“I will collect data about their pain level and general wellbeing, how they mobilised, and how they ate and drank during that time – all part of their recovery.

“Once we’ve recruited enough patients, a statistician will compare the data collected from the two groups and results will be used to inform a future larger study.”

Ana is happy to answer any questions from colleagues, patients, or members of the public – just drop her a line on Ana-Maria.Toth@SomersetFT.nhs.uk.