Autogenic Therapy and Training Overview

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Autogenic Therapy (AT), is a complete conceptualized therapy based on the mind/body relationship, engaging mental and bodily functions simultaneously. 'Autogenic' refers to the self-generated process which distinguishes the method. In the Autogenic state there are EEG changes, closely resembling those of meditation, where there is an increase in alpha waves, balancing of the right and left hemispheres and an upward shift into the theta region. (1)

Autogenic Training is the basis of this therapy where patients are instructed in the use of combinations of psychophysiological verbal formulae. Repetition of the formulae using passive concentration (which is a relaxed non-striving attitude, unconcerned with achievable results) and the use of specific postures which reduce the sensory input from the environment, results in a state of altered consciousness, not identical to hypnosis, self-hypnosis or sleep. The self-directed nature of this approach has advantages over conventional hypnosis as the patient takes an active and responsible role and there is a reduction in dependence on the therapist, thereby empowering the patient.

AT was developed some 75 years ago by the German psychiatrist and neurologist Dr Johannes Schultz who worked in the first half of the twentieth century in association with other significant doctors, including Sigmund Freud, on the mind/body problem. He was particularly interested in research on the human brain by Professor Oscar Vogt at the Neuro-Biological Institute for Brain Research in Berlin. Vogt had discovered that patients practising simple self-induced verbal exercises to bring on the hypnotic state reported a state of well being and feelings of heaviness and warmth in the limbs. Various complaints, such as headache and fatigue, irritability, apprehension and tension disappeared. Schultz explored the possibility of whether a patient could, without hypnosis, produce a similar mental state. He found this to be so and developed the six mental formulae which are the basis of Autogenic Training. The method was developed further by a colleague, Dr Wolfgang Luthe, a chest physician who used AT with asthmatics with very positive results. Luthe also collaborated with Professor Hans Selye, the world expert on stress, using AT in the International Institute for Stress in Canada. He devoted much of his working life to writing and research into AT.

A very useful and up-to-date paper on AT is Autogenic Training, a Narrative and Qualitative Review of Clinical Outcome, by W. Linden. (2) This is a metanalysis of research carried out on the use of AT for various medical conditions such as hypertension, angina, migraine, asthma, childbirth, infertility, skin disorders, stress, anxiety and tension.

AT came to Britain in the late 1970s and the British Association for Autogenic Training and Therapy, now The British Autogenic Society, was founded.
AT can provide a flexible approach to many organic and psychosomatic illnesses and in healthy people it can improve peak performance at work, in sport, at school and in interpersonal relationships. It is taught individually or in groups by trained therapists. A therapeutic contract is inherent throughout. The aim is to help the patient to recognize the cause of his/her problems and symptoms and to change maladaptive emotional and behavioural patterns, thereby reaching a point of psychological freedom, substituting the 'victim' status for awareness and choice in relationships and personal development.

Patients who regularly use the Autogenic method can produce a healthy dynamic balance; a 'hardiness', a collection of psychic qualities such as engagement, self-commitment, taking control, seeing problems not as a threat but as a challenge, a more relaxed approach to life, and a trust in one's own natural healing forces.

The British Autogenic Society, founded in the late 1970s, has its headquarters at the Royal Homoeopathic Hospital. It is responsible for training and accrediting therapists, regulating standards of practice and promoting research.

The Royal London Homoeopathic Hospital has had its own department for Autogenic Training for the past 12 years. A recent audit showed extremely positive results across the wide range of conditions which are presented at the hospital. (3) The hospital can accept direct NHS GP referrals.

References.
