

EXPERTS TELL WHY

Truth Not Assured by Hypnosis, Drugs

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There is no guarantee that the story told by a person under hypnosis is true, according to authorities.

The same thing applies to a subject who is under the influence of sodium pentothal, the so-called truth serum, say psychiatrists who have been using the drug for years.

Both were used on Perry Raymond Russo, a key witness in the New Orleans investigation of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

"A person will not intentionally lie under hypnosis, but if you ask me whether he can be made to lie I must say yes," a Los Angeles psychologist who uses hypnotism in therapy said Thursday.

He explained that a skillful hypnotist could present questions to the subject in such a form that he would be unaware he was telling a lie.

"So you would have to say that although a subject says what he believes to be true, it may not in fact be truthful," the psychologist said.

Another authority said that the use of sodium pentothal also is no assurance of truthful testimony.

"If an individual is a pathological liar, he will lie under the influence of sodium pentothal just as he does when he's not under the influence," he said.

Not Truth Serum

"It is very useful under certain circumstances because it lowers inhibitions which may be blocking the release of certain information, but it is not a truth serum."

During a preliminary hearing Thursday, a defense attorney implied that Russo may have been under the influence of

hypnosis when he testified Tuesday, the opening day of court proceedings. Earlier, Russo had said he had been hypnotized three times between Feb. 24 and Monday.

The Los Angeles authority said the attorney's speculation is technically possible. Such a performance is called post-hypnotic suggestion.

In post-hypnotic suggestion, the subject is hypnotized and told that at a given time in the future, after he has been removed from his hypnotic trance, he will respond in a certain way. The hypnotist then proceeds to tell him how to respond.

If the hypnotist suggests that the subject respond in a certain way to questions that will be asked of him, the subject will say exact-

ly what he has been told to say—provided that doing so is compatible with his value system.

But if his value system is such that he cannot accept the particular kind of instructions he is receiving, he will refuse to execute the instructions given him by the hypnotist.

"In other words, he may accept certain instructions but not others—it all depends on what kind of a person he is," the expert said. "If you suggest under hypnosis that he kill someone the next day, he won't do it unless it is compatible with his value system."

Cooperation Needed

In the case of sodium pentothal, another authority said a clever psychiatrist often can push a patient into saying anything he wants him to say, provided the individual is cooperative. In other circumstances, the patient may say nothing, or tell only lies.

Sodium pentothal is classified as an anesthetic.

It is commonly used in the operating room as the sole anesthetic if the surgery is to be brief, or in conjunction with other anesthetic agents. It is also used to control convulsions and in dental extractions.

The drug acquired its reputation as a truth serum during World War II, when doctors used it to get fliers who were in a state of hysteria following shocking experiences to recount those experiences.

It has since been used, sometimes successfully, on hysterical psychiatric patients or amnesia victims.

The drug is given by injection in a dark, quiet room in order to block out all outside stimulation. The doctor must be careful not to give too much or the patient will become completely anesthetized.

The usual practice is to ask the patient to start at 100 and slowly count backwards. The doctor tells by the slurring of the patient's speech and other signs when enough has been given to remove inhibitions without making him unconscious.