

# Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

1<sup>st</sup> Meeting, 2022 (Session 6), Wednesday 19  
January 2022

PE1873: Provide hypnotherapy for the  
treatment of mental health, psychosomatic  
disorders and chronic pain

## Note by the Clerk

**Lodged:** 25 May 2021

**Petitioner** Graeme Harvey on behalf of the Scottish Hypnotherapy Foundation

**Petition  
summary** Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government  
to instruct the NHS to provide hypnotherapy for the treatment of  
mental health, psychosomatic disorders and chronic pain.

**Webpage** <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1873>

## Introduction

1. The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting [on 22 September 2021](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to NHS Scotland Health Boards and to seek evidence on the use of hypnotherapy in other countries.
2. A summary of past consideration of the petition and responses to information requests are provided for the Committee's consideration.
3. SPICe produced a [literature review](#) to summarise available research for the Committee.

## Background

4. During its consideration of this petition, the Committee received 7 written submissions.

5. The SPICe briefing explains that clinical hypnotherapy can be used for a variety of therapeutic purposes but is most commonly used to manage symptoms of long-term conditions or achieving lifestyle changes such as weight loss.
6. Hypnotherapy is considered as a complementary therapy and is not a regulated profession. This means that anyone can set up a hypnotherapy business but standards of training and conduct provide a level of self-regulation.
7. During its last consideration, the Committee considered submissions from the Scottish Government and the petitioner.
8. The Scottish Government stated that it is up to individual NHS Boards to decide which Complementary and Alternative Medicine Services (CAMS) are made available.
9. Generally, the submission highlighted a lack of evidence supporting the wider use of hypnotherapy, stating that hypnotherapy does not meet the standard of evidence required for use as a psychological treatment. When considering hypnotherapy as a method of managing chronic pain, hypnosis is recognised as a method for pain management. However, [Scottish Intercollegiate Network Guidelines](#), state that “no good-quality studies were identified to evaluate the efficacy of hypnotherapy” and recommends that further research is required to establish the efficacy of this intervention for people with chronic pain.
10. In response to the Scottish Government, the petitioner suggests that the two main issues are lack of regulation under legislation and a lack of research. The submission explains that hypnotherapy is not regulated because the UK Government decided that it is a safe modality and self-regulation should be sufficient.
11. On the issue of evidence, the submission details results from Dr Barrios, psychologist, in the 1970s which shows recovery rates of hypnotherapy at 93% in 6 sessions, compared to 72% over 22 sessions of behaviour therapy and 38% over 600 sessions of psychoanalysis.

## SPICe Literature Review

12. SPICe have provided a summary of available research on hypnotherapy conducted in other countries.
13. The summary concludes by highlighting that IBS (irritable bowel syndrome) appears to be the condition with the most research on efficacy of hypnotherapy, stating that ‘The evidence, including a recommendation by NICE, most strongly supports hypnotherapy as a treatment for IBS in adults. While evidence for hypnotherapy as a treatment for IBS in children is less substantial, the studies that do exist suggest a similar effectiveness.’
14. It notes that evidence for other conditions is more mixed:

- There is no high-quality evidence to suggest that hypnosis is a more beneficial treatment for schizophrenia compared to standard interventions, nor is evidence available to assess the effectiveness of hypnosis to prevent postnatal depression. However, there is some evidence to suggest that hypnosis is either as effective, or possibly more effective, than other treatments for anxiety. There is a lack of evidence for other mental health conditions.
- While some studies suggested some benefits of hypnotherapy for chronic pain, most of the reviews reflected that the available evidence was low quality.
- The available overview of the evidence for hypnotherapy as a treatment for psychosomatic disorders (involving the mind and body, physical diseases which are significantly worsened by psychological factors) in general suggests that modern forms of hypnotherapy are effective treatments.

## Leads of Clinical Health Psychology

15. The Leads of Clinical Health Psychology (LCHP) are a group which seeks to improve the psychological well-being of people with physical health problems in Scotland, including those with chronic pain.
16. In response to the petition's reference to the history of hypnotherapy, the LCHP states that 'this is not adequate' to recommend that it should be used in the modern NHS to manage chronic pain in a safe way.
17. On the issue of available evidence, the submission states that there is 'little evidence' for hypnotherapy in providing long term improvements to pain or quality of life. One example provided is that the NICE Committee did not recommend for or against hypnotherapy, concluding that:
  - there was a lack of evidence of the benefit of hypnosis in the management of chronic pain
  - that the evidence available was 'low to very low quality'
  - a recommendation for or against hypnosis could not be made.
18. In conclusion, LCPH states that there is 'inadequate evidence' to support the use of hypnosis in the management of chronic pain in the NHS and that it is unable to support the proposals put forward in the petition.

## NHS Orkney

19. The response received from NHS Orkney stated that it does not currently offer hypnotherapy for chronic pain or mental health due to 'limited clinical indication'

for its use. It does recognise that hypnotherapy can be effective for some phobias and addictions.

20. The submission concludes by stating that if the Scottish Government or Integration Joint Board felt there was a robust evidence base for the use of hypnotherapy, it would explore delivery of this service.

## **North Ayrshire Health & Social Care Partnership**

21. The North Ayrshire Health & Social Care Partnership (NAHSCP) also suggests that there is 'a lack of good quality evidence' on the merits of hypnotherapy. It states that due to this, it does not offer hypnotherapy as a treatment for mental health conditions and 'would not advocate for this in discussion with patients'.
22. Similar to the Leads of Clinical Health Psychology submission, NAHSCP highlighted NICE guidelines and the NICE Committee's decision not to recommend for or against hypnotherapy, due to a lack of quality evidence.

## **Petitioner submission**

23. In his most recent submission, the petitioner reiterates that hypnosis in various forms has been in use for thousands of years. The submission highlights that in 1899 the British Medical Association set up a committee of eleven doctors to investigate hypnotherapy and concluded it was both scientifically and medically proven as a sound healing modality.
24. The petitioner noted that NICE now advocate Mindfulness and Meditation, he believes this is due to concerns about prescription of medications such as anti-depressants. He points out that these practices are not new and have always been a part of hypnotherapy treatments.

## **Action**

The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

## **Clerk to the Committee**

## Annexe

The following submissions are circulated in connection with consideration of the petition at this meeting –

- [PE1873/D: Leads of Clinical Health Psychology submission of 14 October 2021](#)
- [PE1873/E: NHS Orkney submission of 22 October 2021](#)
- [PE1873/F: North Ayrshire Health & Social Care Partnership submission of 25 October 2021](#)
- [PE1873/G - Petitioner submission of 7 December 2021](#)

Written submissions received on the petition can be viewed on its [webpage](#).