

Guided imagery

Patients create mental pictures to better recover, handle tension

By **DAVE NORDSTRAND**
 The Salinas Californian

To feel better faster, patients such as Ron Ranagan of Salinas turn to medicines and surgery but also to guided imagery.

Ranagan underwent a triple bypass last September.

“My eating and exercise habits were good, but I needed help with stress management,” the 67-year-old said.

Ranagan works as a dispatcher for produce trucks and runs his own advertising business.

“I was reacting too intensely to stress,” he said. “In reality, that was hurting my heart.”

Guided imagery, in which patients create calm mental images as a way of relaxing, has helped Ranagan ease the tension and speed his recovery, he said.

Recognizing its value, many hospitals offer guided imagery.

Eva Giedt, a registered nurse, teaches the technique to patients in private practice and also at Salinas Valley Memorial Hospital.

“Guided imagery can help people overcome the stress, anger, pain, depression and insomnia linked to illnesses and to medical and surgical procedures,” Giedt said.

Countless research studies have given such imagery the stamp of approval, Giedt said.

Benefits, she said, include:

- ▶ Decreased pain and decreased need for pain medication.
- ▶ Decreased side effects and

decreased complications from medical procedures.

- ▶ Reduced recovery time. Shortened hospital stays.
- ▶ Better sleep.
- ▶ Strengthened immune system. Enhanced healing.
- ▶ Increased self-confidence and self-control.

Negative thoughts and emotions can harm health, Giedt said.

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Eva Giedt (facing camera) conducts a guided imagery session with (left to right) Kathleen Ginn, Fil Anacleto and Ron Ranagan.

Guided imagery can address that reality.

Take the heart, for example. “Emotions are not fuzzy little clouds,” Giedt said. “They’re biochemical messengers. So if you’re angry all day, you’re flooding your body with chemicals that are hard

on the heart.”

The top cause of heart disease is smoking. The runner-up, though, is “psycho-social issues,” meaning hostility, anger, loneliness.

Giedt recalled a 30-year-old woman set to have a mastectomy. Naturally, the patient was anxious.

“I sat her in a chair,” Giedt said. “I lead her through a guided visualization.

“She envisioned the surgery going very well, like athletes going for gold. She brought in images of supportive people, of pets, of spiritual images.”

Giedt recorded the hour-long session. The woman listened to the tape every day, even as they

rolled her gurney into the operating room.

“She was completely relaxed,” Giedt said. “The recovery went well. Not only do these (guided imagery) patients do better in surgery, they recover faster.”

Sophisticated guided imagery tools are increasingly coming on the market.

Under her company, Synoptics Research, LLC, Judy Lomba of Santa Cruz has created a guided imagery DVD called “Guided Visualization: Working with the healing power of your immune system.”

She hopes to market the 24-minute DVD to hospitals including Salinas Valley Memorial.

For 20 years, Lomba had a practice in hypnotherapy. She helped patients toward management of chronic pain.

Focus her DVD is on the immune system.

It opens with footage of ocean and beach scenery coupled with a narrative, which leads the patients away from their immediate environments.

“Away from hospital noise, dialysis, machines and chemo or simply the mental chatter of an overactive or fearful mind,” Lomba said.

“The target audience is anyone suffering chronic pain — psychological or physiological,” Lomba said.

Animation shows that healthy

cells are constantly at work fighting disease.

Ranagan has made a sound recovery, he said. He’s ready to go back to work any day. He expects to continue visual imagery and to make it a part of his life.

“There’s a lot to be said for the mind/body approach,” he said. “I definitely have faith in it. Stress could be the main problem.

“Might as well cover all the basis.” ♦



DETAILS

- To find out about the guided imagery classes at **Salinas Valley Memorial Hospital**, call the Health Promotion Department at **759-1890**.
- Eva Giedt, who teaches the technique of guided imagery at SVMH is also in private practice. To reach her on her business phone, call **236-7110**. The “Guided Visualization, Working with the Healing Power of Your Immune System,” 24-minute DVD from Synoptics Research, LLC, sells for \$34.95.
- For information and to order, go to www.synopticsresearch.com, or call **476-5471**.
- The Synoptics DVD and other guided imagery materials are for sale in the lobby store at SVMH.