

SPONTANEOUS REACTIONS TO METRAZOL THERAPY

By L. KERSCHBAUMER, M.D.

MASSILLON, OHIO

No other therapy arouses so much and so interesting comment from the treated patients themselves (and also from some peepers) as the Metrazol Therapy. Its dramatic "going under" and almost immediate "coming to again" or "revival", in some an indefinite fear, in others the definite fear of death, acts as a highly impressive stimulus. All cases discussed here are schizophrenics with one exception, a manic.

Case histories are purposely summarized briefly as the emphasis is placed on the spontaneous reactions from the patients themselves, verbal reactions or in writing as expressed in letters to relatives. The verbal responses are from comment, to criticism, of the therapy to the treating staff physician. The patients' responses were not asked for. There was no question put before the patients if or how they liked this treatment. The importance had been placed upon the spontaneity of patient's own reasoning and judgment and general reaction.

However during frequent ward rounds and particularly upon a patient's request, the author conducted interviews based upon psychodynamic principles but carried out in a simplified, informal manner. The contents of the delusions and hallucinations and other symptoms were briefly stressed before and in some after the post-metrazol sleep period and also during the intervals and with the reassurance that this "going under" and (smilingly) "good shaking" will free him of those peculiar ideas, etc. In all cases there was a close patient-physician relationship. In one case the positive transference was excessive. Some male patients see in the woman-psychiatrist a sweetheart, wife, beloved sister or mother substitute.

In some the positive transference makes them submit more readily to the treatment in spite of the fear of death that sometimes develops not at the beginning but after the first 3 or 4 shocks.

Case 1.—E.W., admitted July 24, 1941, male, 16 years old, tenth grade education, student, single, dependent on father.

First symptoms appeared about 2 years ago when he shunned companions, shut himself in his room, masturbated excessively. Thinks he has no friends. He has fantastic ideas about his person. Patient's father is "nervous" and queer, grandfather died from cancer, mother from anemia at the age of 26 years. Mother and siblings are on relief. One had a forced marriage and several relatives had other psychotic traits.

Patient failed one semester in High School as he could not concentrate on his studies. Confused about sex. He talked about growing up so he

could get married. He did not like any of the girls except his sister to whom, during a brief separation, he wrote a letter: "It is hot here. How is the dog?" School companions made fun of him, called him "Simp" which hurt his pride badly. His brother also turned against him because they called him "Simp's brother". Gradually he lost interest in life. He slept until noon, played the radio automatically. He could not associate with boys of his own age although he tried hard. Always had an uncontrollable temper, "flies off the handle" easily. Day dreaming, is spiteful, lazy, a "smarty" inclined to show off. Then again he is sad, restless, overtalkative. Had trouble at the Y. M. C. A. where he was told to get out and stay out. He is giggling, grimacing in response to auditory hallucinations: "the Lord talks to him to go to Hollywood". "Generation of home power" brought him here. He says: "Two trains and two dogs. I just cannot figure the whole thing out. It's so complicated and like thunder and lightning and a new discovery." He is bothered by "bad dreams" whereupon he threw his bed clothes out: "I was at the Police Station and they tried to murder me and I could not get out and always more were coming in. And a truck pulled up with lots of dead people there and shooting and they called me "Simp" too. Physical condition: asthenic build, some anemic and underweight, otherwise negative.

The patient's reaction to metrazol therapy is expressed in the following letter:

The Hospital Mail.

Dear Dad: Just a line for now as I have just came off mail 6 (Male 6) to Ward number 7. Since being here have had a spinal, finger blood test, 3 metazal shots in the right arm, 1 metazal in the left arm, 1 arm muscle spinal and 1 metazal shot by Doctor Kurley (author's name misspelled) and 3 more sleepers by metazal treatments making a total of 11. Had me out to staff and was talking about taking me home for awhile. Will do so if you will come and get me, now. Had ice cream for dinner yesterday and to-day. A lot of card playing here. Remember when you brought me down we got a flat tire and you brought me ice cream and candy.—etc. Remember just like me, my advancement and character. Take good care of my bicycle.

Your Son, Very Sincerely, E. W. (family name).

NOTE: Patient calls some of the metrazol shocks "sleepers", as he slept afterwards.

Case 2.—W.R., admitted Sept. 9, 1936, age 31, single, 2 years college, salesman. Cancer and tuberculosis in family. He was always retired and placid. Loss of interest in life. Sad and gloomy, restless, dull. He expressed the desire to be better educated. Poor sleeper. He is restless nights but would sleep mornings. Evasive. Changed occupations frequently. He says he has taken particular interest in his grandmother giving her recreation since she has only a few years to live. When asked about the sex part of his life he says he wanted to keep young. Unable to adjust to home situation. Friction with mother and grandmother. Not alert enough. Yawns frequently during examination. I.Q. 90. Onset was gradual for 4 years with increasing indifference and withdrawal from environment. Laughs in a silly manner. Has feelings of inferiority.

He received 12 metrazol shocks, increasing from 6 cc. to 8½ cc. Patient's reaction to metrazol therapy:

Dear Mother and Grandmother: This has been some week here; have never spent a more important one in my life. Guess they are working I have been under a doctors care for the past week (this is the 3rd metrazol week!) and they got done yesterday the lady told me. she has been very nice to me but got through. As ever W. R. (family name).

NOTE: Previous hospitalization with occasional interviews he does not consider as "a doctor working".

After 4 metrazol shocks he started to reject them and would implore his woman-physician: "Lady, please, not them shots anymore. If I should have hurt your feelings I did not mean to do it. Lady, look. I work, I am working all day long and I feel as good as I ever did. What do you want me to do? I do everything you ask from me but, please, Lady, no shots anymore." Before the next metrazol shock he implored: "I pay you, Lady, if you want my money. I pay you not to give me any shots anymore." Improved. Outside Detail work.

Case 3.—J.T., admitted October 4, 1941, male, married, 2 children, farming, 8th grade education, poor, no religion.

Transferred to the State Hospital from the Penitentiary after expiration of 5 year term for larceny of domestic animals. Heredity: mother and maternal aunt died in the same State Hospital.

Patient states that he fell off the roof of the powerhouse at the Penitentiary because "they were tampering with his mind". He thinks his mind is controlled by radio causing pain and suffering whenever State officials see to it. The "radio control" started a few days after he was in prison. He had stolen four little pigs and had sold them to buy liquor to get drunk as he had financial difficulties with the farm he had rented. Patient says that the ex-governor's son was the instigator of that "radio control" that effects the whole body and makes people (also fellow prisoners) do things to get them into trouble, things that they would not do otherwise and that they repent afterwards. Tooth infection and that fall where he "broke his fingers" (a delusion) he ascribes to "radio control". He says: "It comes with every sound you hear but they get it on the train too. It is done through that prosecuting attorney, the ex-governor's son." Patient threatened that when he gets out of here he will find some legal authority. Several weeks after his parole—as improved—to his wife whom he wanted to divorce, he tried to sue the State for "broken teeth" and "broken fingers" allegedly sustained during the metrazol therapy that he had rejected very much for fear of death.

As he was much improved apparently after 6 metrazol shocks of 7 cc. each, this patient, a paranoid schizophrenic, was even trusted to work for the butcher. He admitted he enjoyed stabbing the pigs (still much unsublimated aggression!) and once he received an accidental flesh wound by knife in left thenar. Although advised against he kept butchering. The wound healed.

Note his paranoidal misinterpretation of this injury during butchering and the return of his old delusions about the teeth and broken fingers.

Letter to his wife, almost "ex-wife" whom he had accused of "foul play" for signing the metrazol consent:

Mrs. T.—Just a line to let you know that I received your letter and I

was advised by the Dr. they were going to call me to the staff this week and send me home to farm. Just how soon I will find out when called to staff? I told this lady Dr: If it were NOT that I was MARRIED I would kiss her for that! She replied I'm getting kissed too much! so that let me out. So this is all the news I have at this time. Hope to see you before long. As ever J. V. T. (family name)

Case 4.—J.G., admitted April 29, 1941, male, single, 25 years, 2nd year High School. He always talked very little, was shy, not very sociable. Shiftless at jobs as common laborer. He refused to get out of bed, became mute, resistive, uncooperative. He refused to eat, drink and became untidy. He remains in an unnatural, constrained, semi-sitting position, resting on his elbows. He received metrazol therapy to snap out of his catatonic stupor. Several months afterwards he went into catatonic excitement. Very destructive. Nights he wrecked his bedstead. He pulled the innerspring out of joints after he had torn and bitten his bed clothes and 2 mattresses to shreds.

He showed interesting psychodynamic factors. During the period of extreme aggression against his bed he shouted at his woman-physician: "Get away! I don't want you! You are my sister!" Then again: "Get away from me, mother!" His hatred was more directed against his sister than his mother. His father, a miner, is known as "unreliable". When patient was 2 years old his mother died and left him to the care of his sister for whom he became correspondent when she had also been committed to the same mental hospital. Illicit sex relations were admitted. Incest is suspected.

This patient received 8 metrazol shocks of 6 to 8 cc. Much improved since. He works well and with interest in the carpenter shop. Is also playing cards, is agreeable and sociable. Appears an entirely different person: "May I work outdoors, Dr? I would not run away. I like you too much." (He blushes when talking to his woman-physician, his sister substitute.) At another occasion: "Those shots did me lots of good. But (humorously), I shall let you know when I need some more."

Case 5.—R.M., white male, 34 years, married, 2 children. Education part High School. House painter. Father inebriate and peculiar. First admission to State Hospital on July 17, 1939. Much improved upon 6 metrazol shocks. Paroled Dec. 20, 1940 but on April 10, 1942 returned in handcuffs. Imagines that "electricity" is bothering him. Domestic relations unpleasant. He tried to drown his wife in the bath tub, also choked her. She complained that his sexual demands were too much for anyone. Patient admits he loved his mother more than his wife. He started to dig up his mother's grave to "resurrect" her. He says the blood in her vessels coagulated and he can get it to flow again, that's all it needs.

His mother had died suddenly from a heart attack and patient found her dead in bed when he had taken breakfast to her. Patient says that his woman-physician looks so much like his mother and reminds him of her. Once during an interview he suddenly pats his physician on knee, saying: "I am all right, sweetheart, you don't have to worry about me." He makes further advances during another interview and asks his doctor to keep house for him and his Dad. In response to hallucinations where he sees his estranged wife and two small children, he suddenly exclaims: "I am not going to kill her." When in bed he talks about lying on cliffs and he hears

water roaring under his pillow. When much excited he makes trigger pulling motions, talks about shooting and about semen not being used in vagina decays in the soil and turns into salt that is sprinkled all over. He thinks he has too much salt in his veins what causes "lumps on his neck". Tears up his bed. He assumes an occasional threatening attitude against some male attendant but never against his woman-physician (mother substitute). He is listening to "code messages" and talks about that "black devil". He confesses he got gonorrhea from a married woman and hands his physician a crumbled note confessing fellatio with an aunt (to whom he contemplates parole). Expresses guilt feelings over this "sin".

This patient has confidence in metrazol treatment and says he improved from it last time.

He received 8 metrazol shocks of $4\frac{1}{2}$ to $6\frac{1}{2}$ cc. In his pre-shock fear of death he hangs on to his physician and asks her if she will dig him up in case he dies? He considers himself "her boy". After seventh shock considerable improvement. Asks his physician during the post-shock phase: "Just stay with me for a while as I do not feel so good. I have gas on the stomach. I shall pay you back some day for all you have done for me." But before the eighth shock again he made some fuss against it, talking about unfavorable criticism of the metrazol treatment that he allegedly read in the newspaper. Soon after this he had a relapse.

Another young schizophrenic, imagining himself to be in the Navy although he never enlisted and in a mild catatonic stupor, ate a doughnut for breakfast when told not to. He had "caught on" that "no breakfast" means metrazol treatment that he rejected.

A fairly young female manic who used to be part of a circus side show, was swearing and cursing as loud as she could. She asked what these shots were good for. "To make you quit cursing and swearing," her doctor told her. And she never cursed any more!

Another young schizophrenic male patient, shy, seclusive, near mutism, for years a docile, slow, automatic ward worker without any interest in anything, had been threatened by his physician to get metrazol, the "shaking treatment", accompanied by a demonstration of it, if he does not soon wake up, get peppier and work faster and with more interest. Immediately he started to talk in his defense against metrazol, worked with more zest and looked brighter and when he saw his doctor approaching he busied himself where he could not be overlooked. No letter writer previously, the fear of the metrazol treatment was the stimulus to the following interesting output:

Dear Mamma: I wish you would act at once. Please, drop everything and come up as soon as you get this card and parole me out. I can work now and I will do all I can if you will give me a chance. I wouldn't do this if it weren't urgent. We must act at once. I can explain when I see you. If you can't come please write to the superintendent and tell him you will parole me and not (not is underlined!) to give me the Metrazol treatment.

And he wrote another letter on the same day:

Dear Grandma: I got your card Monday. I am glad you are better. I

guess you don't know what the Metrazol treatment is. When it is injected in the arm it produces a schizophrenia. That is it produces a shock to the brain, doubles the muscles up in a knot and makes the patient unconscious for a time. It is a very severe treatment. The doctor told me they would give me a little to straighten up and to do more work. I am working most of the time on the ward now. The way my nerves are because of the nerve exhaustion I am sure I could not stand the Metrazol. What I have read about it is that it sometimes causes death. I know I don't need it and I want to come home because I can work now and there is something I find to do when I get home. I don't belong here now. Now please act at once if you can't come write to the doctor and tell them that you don't want me to take Metrazol and that you will take me home. Won't you please, do this for me? Yours sincerely.

Metrazol consent was not obtained.

Another young schizophrenic, gradually emerging from his catatonic stupor of several weeks duration used to throw himself in the path of his physician on ward rounds, asking like a child: "I want that too, that treatment that the others are getting." He got his wish fulfilled but after the fourth shock he balked and implored against it. On eight shocks he had much improved and returned to work.

Another excited young schizophrenic who liked to watch the metrazol shocks became jealous of the treated patients and complained: "Why don't I get those shots too like the others so that I can also go home?" as he saw some metrazol patients being paroled.

Metrazol therapy makes for a closer patient-physician relationship as the patient quasi clings to his rescuer. Certain psychodynamic factors are then more readily brought to the surface to be subjected to reasoning. The improvement seems to be partly due to repeated interviews when the patient (and the psychiatrist also!) are in the right mood for it. These interviews can also be carried out on schizophrenics where the disease process has not yet disintegrated the contact with the environment. The interviews before and after the post-shock sleep period are along the lines of a simplified psychoanalysis and psychotherapy.

The author thinks that in general more attention should be paid to what the patient has to say, orally and in writing, and that mental patients in institutions should be talked to more, rather than being talked about, and that the shock and any therapy should be supplemented by repeated psychiatric interviews.

State Hospital
Massillon, Ohio