

Editorial

Mesmer and the Triad of Body, Mind and Spirit

Jaime Hinzpeter C^{1*} 

¹Associate Professor, Faculty of Medicine University of Chile Department of Orthopaedic Surgery, Clinical Hospital University of Chile Santiago, Chile

*Correspondence author: Jaime Hinzpeter C, MD, Associate Professor, Faculty of Medicine University of Chile Department of Orthopaedic Surgery, Clinical Hospital University of Chile Santiago, Chile; Email: jhinzpeter@hcuch.cl

Citation: Jaime HC. Mesmer and the Triad of Body, Mind and Spirit. *Jour Clin Med Res.* 2025;6(2):1-3.

<https://doi.org/10.46889/JCMR.2025.6207>

Received Date: 02-06-2025

Accepted Date: 16-06-2025

Published Date: 24-06-2025



Copyright: © 2025 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CCBY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Editorial

Allow me, reader, a reflection before starting a consultation with my patient. Over the years, I have performed many surgeries. Procedures that require experience, given their complexity and postoperative recovery. I have accompanied patients throughout their rehabilitation, which at times has extended due to everyone's age and/or physiology. There have also been times when I've sensed the emergence of my patient's mental state. Fears, anxieties and preoperative depression all impact the patient's eventual recovery to some degree. Today, it's no secret the importance we physicians place on the physical body, the mind and the spirit. A couple of centuries ago, this triad was merely a shadow of its full potential.

In the 19th century, there was a man, a doctor, who was interested in subjects that still had no answers, much less any connection between them. He pioneered a striking, imperfect and rejected technique. But as the famous writer Stefan Zweig said: "Just because you've gone astray doesn't mean you're no longer a pioneer [1].

"Franz Anton Mesmer was born in 1734 in southeastern Germany (then part of the Holy Roman Empire). He graduated as a doctor in 1766 with a thesis that was atypical for the purist rationalism of his time (the influence of the moon on health and illness). Mesmer also considered that the prevailing medical treatments, such as bloodletting and enemas, were aggressive and ineffective. It would take him years to enter the pages of history as a precursor to hypnosis.

In 1774, Mesmer learned that Maximilien Hell, an astronomer and Jesuit of the court of Empress Maria Theresa, was dedicated to curing his patients by placing a steel magnet on the areas of the body he considered to be diseased. Franz Mesmer attended one of these healing sessions and was captivated by the method and decided to experiment with it himself. In his first attempts, the doctor observed that the pain initially increased with the magnet treatment. However, the worsening was followed by a period of "quiet inactivity," followed by a gradual and complete recovery [2-4]. The spark had ignited in the German's mind and it was not to be stopped. Shortly thereafter, Mesmer stopped using magnets and focused on the "magnetic atmosphere" (the contact between the patient and a "magnetized object").

His theory was that humans have an invisible fluid, animal magnetism, which can flow directly from the body itself and that blocking its circulation and its flow causes crises and subsequent illness [5].

The doctor typically used a vessel or barrel of water containing pieces of glass and metal shavings (he also magnetized musical instruments). He then moved on to elaborate theatrical routines, which were incredibly impressive. Groups of patients were formed, holding hands to transmit and amplify the "magnetic" chain. The literature tells us that the doctor, like a good musician, played the violin to liven up the procedures, even performing massages on the affected limb. He treated illnesses, primarily psychological ones like hysteria, but also covered many others (too many), such as gout, convulsions, tinnitus, paralysis, stomach cramps, menstrual irregularities, insomnia, liver pain and optical weakness, among other conditions [6]. Thus, Mesmer became a famous figure in Vienna and its surroundings. He had famous successes and failures. He excelled with his patient, François Osterlin, a friend of the Mozart family, who were also friends of Mesmer. François's recovery is reflected in her letters of gratitude

to the doctor: "Without a doubt, Dr. Mesmer's medicine and the sounds that accompany it have restored her health" [3]. The major setback came with pianist Vanessa Paradis, where Mesmer dared to defy the ophthalmologists who declared her blind due to damage to her optic nerve. According to close relatives, after treatment, the patient began to distinguish contours, which caused displeasure and skepticism among the academy. Paradis lived in the home of her doctor, where the magnetic pool and other devices were put to work to reverse her blindness. Everything was going smoothly until the Empress and the court ordered the treatment to be discontinued. For good. After this episode, Mesmer decided to go into self-imposed exile and traveled to Paris, where his popularity grew even further. But it was there that he faced the greatest danger and he was discredited years later by a formal scientific commission appointed by the King, which effectively put an end to the German doctor's Parisian adventure. This commission (which included, among others, Dr. Joseph Guillotine, creator of the guillotine) reported in August 1784 that Dr. Mesmer's method was a product of imagination and fantasy [4].

One of the weakest points of the Germanic theory was that his "universal fluid" was not defined with physical properties and form. Moreover, Dr. Mesmer himself harbored doubts. Early in his theory, he stated in a lecture, "That his theory was not a mysterious remedy, but science, science with principles, although... with rules largely unknown." (¡?)".

In 1815, already in his eighties, Mesmer died near Lake Constance, curiously the same place where he was born. It is said that he died while listening to a friend play his beloved glass harmonica. Dr. Franz, in addition to his lack of method verification, was affected by his theatrics (his necklace-like bag with a magnet, for example, when he attended and magnetized) and by gadgets that distracted him and led him away from the path of clearly and irrefutably proving the true existence of the universal fluid to which he dedicated his professional life and also his fortune. He incorrectly approached pathologies that were subject to other solutions. To the German's credit, we could say that he always strove to provide the best, treat the patient honestly and treat both the rich and the poor without distinction. Perhaps, ultimately, Mesmer's true merit lay precisely in that: in influencing his patient, achieving that suggestion and "transporting the pain" out of the human body [3]. His work was followed and improved by others who were more successful. A student of Franz, the Marquis Maxime Puy Seugur, discovered that, through animal magnetism, not only could the patient convulse, but it was also possible to achieve an artificial somnambulism similar to natural sleepwalking. Finally, a century later, the wise Dr. Jean Martin Charcot, French neurologist and psychiatrist, managed to have hypnosis recognized (which replaced mesmerism) and gave it legitimacy as a therapeutic tool.

History tells us that there is no therapy that doesn't work, it gives hope, emits a light and a spark. Mesmer glimpsed that spark, but the idea lacked wings and wasn't able to take flight. Franz Anton Mesmer, a charlatan or genius? Perhaps neither. A paradoxical existence, no doubt. A precursor to the study of the mind and spirit and their influence on the physical body, at a time when all these subjects were in their primitive state [7,8].

They say faith can move mountains. What I believe is that the power of suggestion also helps us reach the top. I finally saw my patient today. His mental state improved after the successful operation (complete knee replacement); he no longer feels pain, although there are lingering anxieties about having to undergo long rehabilitation. This is what we talked about today-not about Mesmer or his gadgets, but rather a technical and philosophical conversation, a healing conversation, like those of the doctors of yesteryear, but with current scientific evidence and advancements. The kind that heals the physical body, decompresses the psyche and soothes the spirit [9].

Keywords: COVID-19; Awake Prone; Prone Position

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

References

1. Zweig S. La curación del espíritu. Franz Antón Mesmer, Mary Baker Eddy, Sigmund Freud. Barcelona: Editorial Apolo.1932.
2. Zweig S. Apuntes clásicos modernos. Obras completas IV. Memorias y ensayos. 2nd Eed. Barcelona: Ediciones Juventud. 1959:1668.
3. Calle Albert I. Franz Anton Mesmer. Música y medicina. Sugestión, terapia musical y arte. Valencia: Universidad de Valencia.

4. Psiconetwork. Jean Martin Charcot, aportes a la psicología. 2023.
5. Gonzales Cogollor S. Mesmer y el magnetismo animal. Medicina, psicología. 2017.
6. BBC News Mundo. El mesmerismo. [Last accessed on: June 16, 2025].
<https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-38573543>
7. Psicología y Mente. Mesmer 2025. [Last accessed on: June 16, 2025].
<https://psicologiaymente.com/biografias/mesmer>
8. Psicología Científica. Franz Anton Mesmer: ¿Hereje, charlatán o pionero? 2025. [Last accessed on: June 16, 2025].
<https://www.psicologiacientifica.com/Franz-Anton-Mesmer>
9. Revista de Historia de la Psicología. El sonambulismo. Rev Hist Psicol. 1995;16(3-4):217-24.

Journal of Clinical Medical Research



Publish your work in this journal

Journal of Clinical Medical Research is an international, peer-reviewed, open access journal publishing original research, reports, editorials, reviews and commentaries. All aspects of medical health maintenance, preventative measures and disease treatment interventions are addressed within the journal. Medical experts and other related researchers are invited to submit their work in the journal. The manuscript submission system is online and journal follows a fair peer-review practices.

Submit your manuscript here: <https://athenaeumpub.com/submit-manuscript/>