Counselor uses relaxation to help patients overcome fears

Michael Deninger has a knack for relaxing people. The hypnotist and licensed professional counselor doesn't swing a pocket watch to put people in a trance or snap his fingers to coax a client out. Instead, the 57-year-old counselor, known as 'Dr. Mike,' hypnotizes his patients with his soothing voice and deep-breathing exercises. He uses hypnosis and counseling to help them overcome everything from serious medical health problems to phobias and habits.

"A lot of this is intuitive for me," he said. "Some of it has to do with being with someone and connecting—understanding their journey."

Mr. Deninger sees up to 25 clients per week. He uses counseling or a combination of counseling and hypnosis in working with his patients.

Mr. Deninger says he uses hypnosis "only when I know it's going to be useful. You have to convince the person that change is going to happen."

Mr. Deninger is a certified hypnotherapist in 1999 and received his mental health counseling degree two years earlier. He began his practice in 2001.

"I'm an assistant to the patient," Mr. Deninger tells her, speaking softly into the microphone that connects to the headphones. "You'll be aware throughout the whole process."

Mr. Deninger puts on headphones, reclines in the coach and focuses straight ahead.

"You will be in control the whole time," Mr. Deninger tells her. "You'll be aware throughout the whole process."

Mr. Deninger is a hypnotherapist—not a hypnotist. Hypnotists are not licensed professionals. He became a board-certified hypnotherapist in 1999 and received his mental health counseling degree two years earlier. He began his practice in 2001.

Mr. Deninger uses eye movement integration in this session with Patti Cleary, of Alexandria, at his Phoenix Counseling and Hypnotherapy office. Mr. Deninger is a licensed professional counselor and board-certified hypnotherapist.