Dr Ainslie Dixon Meares (3 March 1910-19 September 1986) was an Australian psychiatrist, scholar of hypnotism, psychotherapist, authority on stress, and a prolific author, who lived and practiced in Melbourne.

**Family:** The son of Albert and Eva Meares, he was born in Malvern, Victoria on 3 March 1910. Both of his parents died when he was 16. He married Bonnie Byrne on 18 June 1934. They had three children: Russell, Garda and Sylvia.

**Education:** He was educated at Melbourne Grammar School, where he boxed and played tennis, and at the University of Melbourne. He graduated with a Bachelor of Agricultural Science (1934) and a Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery (1940) from the University of Melbourne, he gained the Diploma in Psychiatric Medicine (London) in 1947; and, on the basis of his presentation of a collection of seventeen published papers relating to medical hypnotism (with each paper being independent of the others), he was awarded the higher degree of Doctor of Medicine by the University of Melbourne in 1958. He also served as a Captain in the Royal Australian Army Medical Corps (1941-1945). He was a Founding Fellow of the RANZCP (Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists), and, for a time, the president of the International Society for Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis.

**Hypnotism:** He was an internationally recognized expert in the medical uses of hypnotism and wrote a textbook describing his approach.

**Meditation research:** He came to use meditation as a means of treatment of psychosomatic and psychoneurotic illnesses in the late 1960s. Developing on his unrivalled expertise in medical hypnotism, he came to develop an interest in meditation as a treatment for the psychological component of their chronic organic pain. In time, he began research on the biological mechanisms of pain. Unconventionally for his field at the time, he visited India and Nepal in order to document the ways Eastern mystics or yogis influenced their perceptions through spiritual practices, particularly meditation. In Kathmandu, Nepal he met Shiva Puri Baba, believed to be 134 years old. This man taught Meares a simple (i.e., non-complex) meditation technique that Meares applied in his approach to the treatment of pain, amongst other things, in cancer patients. In 1976 he reported in the Medical Journal of Australia about a regression of cancer he attributed to intensive meditation. It is highly significant that his system of meditation did not involve any sort of mental imagery (or "visualization") such as that demanded by other sorts of mind-based interventions such as that promoted in "Getting Well Again" (1978) by Simonton, Simonton, and Creighton. He reported a number of his cases in which his patients, having gone into full remission from his methods had decided, without consultation with him and without his approval, regressed to full-blown cancer consequent to using Simonton-type imagery (he reported also that, having resumed the exclusive application of his techniques, his patients once again went into full remission). Meares, who was reluctant to lecture in public for various legitimate reasons, went on to write a number of popular books, including his best-seller Relief without Drugs.

**Method:** Meares' method included relaxation, emptying the mind and stillness. This approach to meditation reduced it to the most simple essence, which was termed both atavistic regression[2] and mental ataraxis[3] by Meares; that is, in contrast with the far more conventional approaches
to meditation involving mechanics such as watching objects, using mantras, reflecting on spiritual concepts or other thought frameworks involving willpower.

In essence the outstanding difference between Meares' approach and others was his stress on mental relaxation and mental stillness, rather than physical relaxation; and, one of the unusual features of his teaching process was that he often demanded that those learning his techniques would sit in very uncomfortable configurations and, at the same time he would usually have the windows of his Spring Street rooms open so that the noise of the busy city, and especially the sound of the trams passing to and fro, would emphasize that the student's goal was to gain an inner stillness despite the external tensions. His method was radical in its non-aligned, non-religious, reductive approach. As well, it was clearly a pioneering drug-free alternative to health and as well as being non-chemical it was non-mechanical. For Meares, "The key to our management of stress lies in those moments when our brain runs quietly in a way that restores harmony of function..." (Life Without Stress).

In Life Without Stress, he describes it this way, "In the meditation that I would advise you to practice there is no striving, no activity of brain function, just quietness, a stillness of effortless tranquility." For him, brain function meant the brain was engaged even when using classical ways of attention to the breath, visualization or counting.

The letting-go approach encourages achieving stillness by simply letting go thoughts when they arise. By inviting stillness, at first in fragments, stillness increases until it becomes a continuous flow. He stressed the importance of being uncritical of oneself, and of not assessing the process. Meares used the term "just being" rather than being about something or otherwise engaging the mind, "We are seeking a form of relaxation which arises in the brain itself..." In an undramatic way, he encouraged the meditator to just let the mind be still for anything from a mere ten minutes a day. By allowing the mind to "rest" the meditation would affect the flow in other areas of the body, the mind and in functioning in the outer world.

Influences

Ian Gawler: One well-known patient was Australian decathlete and qualified veterinary surgeon Ian Gawler, whose search for a cure for his own bone cancer took him far and wide, including the Philippines. Gawler, whose disease necessitated the amputation of his right leg, eventually gained remission from the cancer through hours of intensive meditation in sessions with Meares. Gawler now lectures widely and heads The Gawler Foundation, offering lifestyle based educational self help programs for people affected specifically by cancer and by multiple sclerosis, as well lifestyle programs for the general public. All these programs feature meditation as a main component. Gawler has written widely on meditation and describes his version as mindfulness-based stillness meditation. This is a combination of deep physical relaxation, mindfulness and the stillness based practices of Dr Meares. Gawler also teaches contemplation and imagery as adjuncts to Meares' main style of meditation.

Pauline McKinnon: Pauline McKinnon, therapist, author of In Stillness Conquer Fear, and initiator of the Life Development Centre in Melbourne with its emphasis on "stillness meditation" attributed to Dr Meares, to reduce anxiety and alleviate anxiety-related states. McKinnon recovered from agoraphobia through her sessions with Meares before going on to become a therapist.

Death: Meares died suddenly, of pneumonia, in a Melbourne hospital on 19 September 1986.
His wife Bonnie had predeceased him in 1979. He was survived by their three children, Russell Meares (also a psychiatrist), Garda Meares Langley, and Sylvia Meares Black. **Selected bibliography**


[edit] Other works
The medical interview; a study of clinically significant interpersonal reactions (1957)
The Introvert (1958)
Shapes of sanity: a study in the therapeutic use of modelling in the waking and hypnotic state (1960)
The management of the anxious patient (1963)
Where magic lies (1968)
Strange places and simple truths (1969)
How to be a Boss: A Practicing Psychiatrist on the Managing of Men (1971)
Dialogue with youth (1973)
The New Woman (1974)
Why be old?: how to avoid the psychological reactions of ageing (1975)
From the Quiet Place: Mental Ataraxis: Thoughts on Meditation (1976)
Marriage and Personality (1977)
The hidden powers of leadership (1978)
My Soul and I (1982)
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