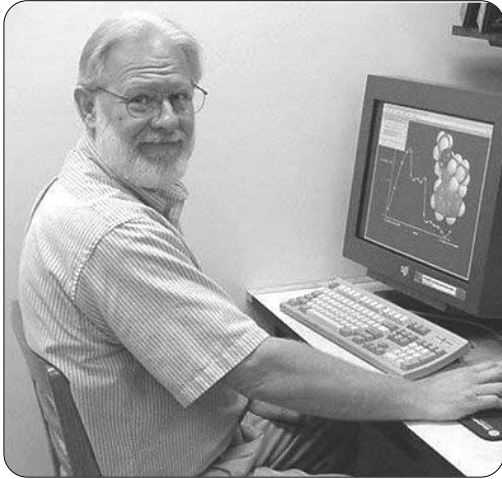


REPORT FROM THE HEFFTER RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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Dave Nichols, Ph.D.

First, we have just published a new edition of *The Heffter Review*. I believe it contains articles of real merit. If you enjoy reading about psychedelic research, you'll want to get a copy!

Second: we have selected Dr. George Aghajanian as the winner of the 2001 Heffter Award for Excellence in Research. Dr. Aghajanian is an outstanding senior neuroscientist at Yale who for nearly three decades has researched how hallucinogens affect the actions of single neurons in the brain. His work exemplifies the quality of science that the Heffter Institute seeks to foster.

We would also like to update you briefly on what's happening at the Institute. Our program continues to develop with steady progress. The Heffter Research Center in Zurich has grown, and there are now eight people working there on the neuroscience of hallucinogens. Several clinical research programs are also maturing in the United States. Here are some highlights on the work in the US, followed by updates on the Swiss research:

• **Obsessive Compulsive Disorder Study:**

The first clinical research study with a hallucinogen in the United States in 30 years has just begun. We've funded a study led by Dr. Francisco Moreno at the University of Arizona Medical School to look into whether psilocybin can be efficacious in the treatment of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). MAPS paid for the synthesis of the psilocybin and organized some staff training lectures and workshops. Several anecdotal reports suggested that acute use of hallucinogens may lead to a profound reduction of symptoms. OCD is a relatively common condition, which appears to result from a serotonin dysfunction. Current treatment relies on the Prozac-like "selective serotonin re-uptake inhibitors (SSRI's)." But these work well only for a relatively small percentage of patients. Psilocybin is a potent serotonin agonist, whose mechanism of action is altogether differ-

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ent from that of the SSRI's. Two important questions will be addressed in this study: 1) do potent hallucinogens lead to an acute decrease in the symptoms of OCD?; and 2) if so, is a full hallucinogenic dose required to demonstrate significant reduction in the symptoms of OCD? The first patient was treated on November 27, 2001, (read Francisco Moreno's article in this issue for a current update), and we look forward to some very interesting data in 2002.

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• **Easing the Anxiety of Death:** Early studies in the 1960s and 70s produced profoundly interesting results when hallucinogens were given to dying patients. An overwhelming majority of them gained benefit from the treatment. Anxiety was reduced, and for many, physical pain was diminished significantly. These results were a prime reason for my original motivation to start up the Heffter Institute, because they were the most well documented evidence of therapeutic value for hallucinogens. We are on track to re-examine the early results with the best modern clinical techniques available. Dr. Charles Grob of Harbor-UCLA Medical Center has completed the design phase of the study. The protocol has been peer-reviewed, and has recently been submitted to the FDA. The study focuses on whether anxiety in the dying can be significantly reduced by the administration of psilocy-

bin. Any attendant reduction in pain will also be measured. We hope to see the clinical phase begin in 2002.

• **Swiss Heffter Research Center:** Professor Franz Vollenweider at the University of Zurich continues to build an extensive and elegant program of research into the nature of consciousness, using hallucinogens as research tools. He now has a team of eight people working with him on a series of co-ordinated studies. Let me mention two, so as to give a flavor of his work. Over the next few months the Swiss team will be carrying out a study on the effects of low dose psilocybin on memory in human subjects between 50 and 65 years of age. They should learn a good deal about the effects of serotonergic agents in facilitating memory in this population for whom measurable memory deficits are an everyday fact of life. This study will also be a foundation stone in the Swiss team's long-term project of investigating how memory is used to construct the human sense of self. Moving to the clinical dimension, the Swiss team is in the process of developing a protocol to test psilocybin as a treatment for bulimia and binge eating disorder. These body dysmorphic disorders may have an etiology similar to that of obsessive compulsive disorder. The thought, therefore, is that a serotonin agonist may also prove efficacious in their treatment. The design of this eating disorder study opens up the exciting possibility of running clinical studies in Switzerland in parallel with the powerful basic neuroscience studies that our Swiss colleagues are so adeptly carrying out.

Finally, don't forget to check our web site www.heffter.org from time to time to see what's new. ■