

Letter from Rick Doblin, Ph.D., MAPS President

Visions are sustaining and guiding forces, pulling us through the darkest nights and most difficult days by virtue of their power to generate inspiration and hope. Yet visions need to become more than just intuitions or dreams in order to become fully realized. For MAPS, our central vision is of the tremendous value that can flow to individuals and cultures from the creation of legal contexts for the full range of beneficial uses of psychedelics and marijuana. This vision, however, is so far-reaching that it can't by itself serve as a plan for action nor is it self-evident why this vision is so compelling or worth sacrificing to bring about.

In order to explain more fully MAPS' vision, we've created this special "Vision" issue of the MAPS Bulletin with just two relatively long articles. The first article offers a strategic rationale and an implementation sequence for the relatively limited and circumscribed vision of the transformation of MDMA into a prescription medicine for the treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This drug development plan is where most of MAPS' staff time and financial resources are directed. As a result, MAPS is on the verge of becoming, in practice as well as in theory, a non-profit psychedelic pharmaceutical company. Therefore, it's both appropriate and necessary to offer to MAPS members a detailed justification and specific plan for evaluation, comment and, hopefully, endorsement and support. This article was originally intended to become the final chapter of my dissertation but as it developed it became clear that the content had crossed the line from analysis into advocacy, and thus needed to be a separate document. A similar plan for the transformation of marijuana into an FDA-approved medicine is in the early stages of development.

The second and final article in this issue is a sweeping discussion of the mystical experience illuminated by science, informed by politics, and endowed with a compassionate and courageous call to action. The article is actually the text of a speech by U.S. Congressional Representative Kucinich (D-OH) that focuses on the political implications of the mystical experience of unity. It's not at all intended to be a psychedelic manifesto but it provides one of the clearest explanations that I've ever read of why MAPS' broad vision of helping to create legal contexts for psychedelic experiences is potentially so transformative and life-affirming. Psychedelics are arguably the most powerful and reliable catalysts of mystical experiences and, as such, offer the potential to facilitate healing transformations of individual personality and collective culture. It's not an accident of history that that oldest and most continuous use of psychedelics has been in religious/spiritual contexts. Yet as Prof. Huston Smith has astutely written, spiritual experiences aren't the same as a spiritual life, which requires constant work grounding the insights of the mystical experiences into daily practice. Rep. Kucinich's speech is a rare attempt to trace the

While this issue is focused on vision, the next issue of the Bulletin will be focused in large part on mundane details, offering a comprehensive explanation of MAPS' income and expenses over the last two years, linked to a discussion of MAPS' myriad research and educational projects and the costs of operating the organization. To lay the groundwork for the upcoming issue, I'll now briefly review the current status of MAPS' most important projects. Because we have encountered substantial obstructions and reversals in almost every project, this review will also highlight the essential contribution of MAPS' vision in providing motivation that enables this organization to persevere despite a challenging environment.

To begin with, for the last several years MAPS has been sponsoring Jose Carlos Bouso's efforts to conduct a pilot study in Madrid, Spain, exploring the use of MDMA-assisted psychotherapy in the treatment of PTSD. This has been the first double-blind, placebo-controlled study of the

therapeutic use of MDMA ever approved and conducted and has also been the world's only ongoing study of any kind into any therapeutic use of MDMA. In May 2002, a series of favorable media articles appeared in Spain about the study. Shortly afterwards, the Spanish Anti-Drug Agency and drug police intimidated the hospital where the study was taking place into shutting down the experiment. The Ministry of Health has not withdrawn approval, so we hope to resume this project, but for now we are engaged in a classic struggle of scientific freedom v. entrenched interests.

For the US MDMA/PTSD project, to be directed by Dr. Michael Mithoefer of Charleston, South Carolina, we've previously reported that we had an application in process with an independent Institutional Review Board (IRB) called the Western IRB (WIRB). On July 10, 2002, we were informed that the WIRB had approved the study. On September 6, 2002, we were totally shocked to hear from the IRB that approval had been revoked, based on conversations (not on data!) that an WIRB staff person had sought out with some outside experts. We weren't even given a chance to respond to the opinions before a decision had been made to revoke the approval! Fortunately, there is a good chance that we can reverse the reversal, but only after a meeting in person with the IRB that is tentatively scheduled for the end of October. In addition to IRB approval, Dr. Mithoefer still needs to obtain a DEA Schedule 1 license prior to our being fully approved to start the study. Dr. Mithoefer applied to the DEA in early July, but for two and a half months, DEA did nothing with the application, telling us that processing it "wasn't a high priority." After frequent complaints, DEA finally entered the application into its computer system and now tells us maybe it will be approved before the end of November.

The Israeli MDMA/PTSD study is contingent on the US MDMA/PTSD being fully approved first. MAPS has organized a seminar about MDMA/PTSD research for the Israeli Ministry of Health and

the Israeli Society of Addiction Medicine, to take place near Tel Aviv on November 14, with a smaller protocol design meeting on November 17.

In Russia, MAPS has for many years been funding Dr. Krupitsky's research into the use of ketamine-assisted psychotherapy in the treatment of heroin addiction and alcoholism. Early in 2002, Russia tightened the regulations controlling ketamine and withdrew permission for Dr. Krupitsky's research. Dr. Krupitsky was told that permission would almost certainly be restored around the end of 2002, but this has not yet taken place.

Regarding medical marijuana research, the Drug Enforcement Administration is still considering the application by Prof. Lyle Craker, UMass Amherst Dept. of Plant and Soil Sciences, Medicinal Plant program, for a license to grow high-potency marijuana only in federally-approved research. The marijuana would be grown under a grant from MAPS. DEA Administrator Asa Hutchinson has previously indicated that DEA can't grant the license due to US international treaty obligations. Complicating matters for the DEA is that along with the license application, Prof. Craker submitted a legal analysis by Washington DC law firm Covington & Burling and the ACLU, working for MAPS and Prof. Craker on a pro-bono basis. The legal analysis made a persuasive case that DEA's interpretation of the treaty is mistaken. It seems clear that DEA opposition to unhindered medical marijuana research is what is actually blocking approval of the license.

Tragically, as you will note on the back cover, Bob Wallace, one of MAPS' most generous supporters, has died an untimely death from pneumonia. In order to honor Bob's memory, and to remain true to the visions that have animated MAPS since its founding in 1986, we will continue to persevere. I hope you continue to journey with us to bring shared visions into being.

– *Rick Doblin, Ph.D. MAPS President.*

