

Developing An Outcome Study of ibogaine therapy

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In conjunction with the Iboga Therapy House and the Ibogaine Association, MAPS is creating a protocol for a new study on the efficacy of ibogaine therapy in the treatment of drug addiction. In addition to membership and sales coordination, my duties at MAPS have grown to include actual psychedelic research, as I begin this project with fellow researchers: program director Randy Hencken and follow-up coordinator Jill Stammer from the Ibogaine Association, and director Sandra Karpetas and follow-up coordinator Ainsley Krone from the Iboga Therapy House. For the first phase of this study, I traveled to both of these clinics in January of 2004 to observe their operations, become acquainted with clinic staff, and coordinate the development of a follow-up protocol to gather data on the outcomes of these treatments. Ibogaine is legal in Canada and Mexico, where these clinics are located, although it is scheduled in the U.S.

IBOGAINE ASSOCIATION

Randy Hencken manages the Ibogaine Association from an office in San Diego. The clients, who are mostly from the U.S., meet with Randy before they are bused to the clinic itself, located in a beautiful gated community overlooking a rocky beach twenty minutes south of the U.S./Mexico border, near Rosarito. Caretakers often take clients for walks on the beach during their recovery stay. Just down the street from the clinic is the residence of Dr. Martin Polanco, who administers the ibogaine treatment and remains on call throughout the client's three-to seven-day stay. The clinic houses the patients during their recovery stay, after they've received the ibogaine treatment at a local hospital.

Most treatments at the Ibogaine Association cost \$3,300, except for treatments of methadone addicts and physically-dependent alcoholics, which take longer and cost \$4,500. The clinic primarily treats people with opiate addictions, but has also seen clients with alcohol and stimulant problems. While ibogaine therapy is not specifically approved in Mexico, Mexican law allows



The ocean is just a short walk down a cobblestone road
from the Ibogaine Association's clinic.



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Dr. Polanco to use this experimental procedure to treat the life-threatening condition of substance addiction.

IBOGA THERAPY HOUSE

The Iboga Therapy House (ITH) is a hidden sanctuary amid the hustle of downtown Vancouver. The staff's Feng Shui mastery is apparent in their transformation of a sterile apartment on the eighth floor of an upscale condo building into a peaceful spiritual retreat, complete with psychedelic art (like that shown above), African masks, and other wall-hangings. The apartment is temporary; they are looking to move to a more natural setting—a larger house with a garden away from the noise of the city—hopefully in the next few months.

Abusers of a more even distribution of substances—opiates, cocaine/crack, alcohol, methamphetamine—are seen at the ITH, where there is no fee charged for treatment. Rather, the ITH operates solely on charitable contributions from *Cannabis* seed entrepreneur and marijuana activist Marc Emery. The clinic is currently seeking funding from additional donors. The ITH is not a licensed facility, as a license is not necessary in Canada.

Both clinics primarily administer ibogaine for the treatment of substance

addiction, though a few clients have come in for personal or spiritual growth. For the purposes of this study, we will only be tracking the people who come in for substance-related problems. We will study clients who complete treatment sequentially at either of the clinics. The protocol includes a one-year series of basic follow-up questionnaires with surveys on substance use patterns, quality of life, and mental health, as well as an initial assessment of the depth of experience (using the *Addiction Severity Index*, *Beck Depression Inventory*, *Beck Anxiety Inventory*, and the *Peak Experience Profile*). To verify information, we will periodically check-in with a significant other associated with the client. The end product will be a formal research paper to submit for publication in a scientific journal.

BREAKING NEW GROUND FOR SCIENCE

This will be the first scientific study of the efficacy of ibogaine therapy. Ibogaine offers a unique inroad to studying the therapeutic applications of psychedelics for two reasons: it is relatively obscure and lacks the stigma of other more recognized psychedelics, and it has the potential to gain approval from both opponents and sympathizers of psychedelic therapy because of its application as a treatment for drug addiction. Another similar study is being conducted by a research team at the Free University of Amsterdam, using an online questionnaire to reach those who have had ibogaine treatment, at www.med.vu.nl/ibogaine. Hopefully both studies will generate new data and new questions about the efficacy of ibogaine therapy.

Ibogaine is acceptable as a treatment for drug addiction because of its pharmacological mechanisms of relieving opiate withdrawal. What makes it exceptional is that this efficacy is related in part to its potential to catalyze a powerful mental experience. In this way, ibogaine therapy may create a paradigm shift that would allow mainstream medicine to consider altered states as therapeutic opportunities. We hope that this project will inspire more research into the psychotherapeutic uses of ibogaine, as well as research into the similar applications of other psychedelics. •