

MAPS-Sponsored **Ibogaine** Observational Case Study Approved



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SINCE FEBRUARY 12, 2005, a MAPS-sponsored research team working on what is now entitled “Observational Case Series Study of the Long-Term Efficacy of Ibogaine-Assisted Therapy and Associated Interventions in Participants with Opiate Addiction Treated at the Iboga Therapy House”—have exchanged over 200 emails and literally dozens of versions of this novel research protocol, all with the goal of getting this study peer-reviewed and approved by a research ethics board.

Way back in February 2005, MAPS President Rick Doblin contacted me to ask if I would help steer an ibogaine and addiction outcome study through the always-complicated Institutional Review Board (IRB) process. Since this study was not associated with a university or hospital-based researcher, MAPS had to use a private IRB. Considering that I had just received approval for a smoked cannabis and chronic pain double-blind clinical study from an independent Canadian review board, Rick asked if I could help MAPS gain approval for the ibogaine outcome study taking place at Iboga Therapy House, located in Vancouver, British Columbia. Rick had suggested this IRB to me in the first place since he had become aware of it during his search for an IRB that would review MAPS’ MDMA/PTSD study, which was finally reviewed and approved by a US IRB.

As a long-time supporter of MAPS, I jumped at the chance to work with this cutting-edge organization. “Sure,” I answered, “I’ve got a few hours to spare over the next couple of weeks.” Honestly, if I had known that 18 months and four IRB submissions later I would still be working on this protocol, I undoubtedly would have answered differently. However, if I’ve learned anything in the many years that I’ve been active in drug policy-related research and activism, it is patience and persistence.

And so it now gives me great pleasure to announce that after months of work and a number of significant changes to the original protocol, MAPS has just received final approval from the IRB to proceed with this study, which will examine changes in substance use in 20 consecutive people seeking ibogaine-based addiction treatment for opiate dependence at Iboga Therapy House. While originally designed as an “outcome study,” the protocol was later changed to an observational case-study when the IRB expressed concerns that the initial design was too close to a clinical trial (which has a much stricter approval process, and was never the intention of the research team anyhow). The Principal Investigator is none other than Rick Doblin, Ph.D., and he’ll be aided by Dr. Ken Alper and Leah Martin, with data analysis to be conducted by MAPS Research Associate Ilsa Jerome.

Now that all of the IRB’s concerns have been successfully addressed, MAPS will soon be able to announce that an investigation on the potential of a novel treatment for opiate dependence is underway in Canada, and I can finally get some well-deserved rest ... at least until the next time Rick calls me up! •

Philippe Lucas is Founder/Director of the Vancouver Island Compassion Society, Research Fellow at the Center for Addiction Research of British Columbia, and the Director of Communications for DrugSense.