

Facing the Unknown: Psychedelic-Assisted Psychotherapy in Subjects with Anxiety Related to End-of-Life Issues

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THERE IS NOTHING more certain in life than death. Modern medicine strives at all costs to postpone it for as long as possible. But for those who are near death and burdened with anxiety, a new treatment is on the horizon. Psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy in patients with anxiety secondary to advanced-stage cancer and other life-threatening illnesses offers promises and hope – not in extending life – but in helping one come to terms with his or her own death.

MAPS is approaching the idea from three different research angles: MDMA-, LSD-, and psilocybin-assisted psychotherapy.

A study developed initially with MAPS' assistance and support is taking place at Harvard University's McLean Hospital under the direction of psychiatrist John Halpern, MD. This study is now enrolling advanced-stage cancer patients with anxiety who are willing to engage in MDMA-assisted psychotherapy. It aims to show reductions in anxiety and pain in patients who receive the experimental dose of MDMA. After substantial delays with recruitment, the study has recently expanded its inclusion criteria to allow more people access to this novel treatment. The study is now able to include subjects who are still receiving palliative care, as well as subjects who are diagnosed with anxiety on the basis of a clinical assessment as well as related measures of anxiety, rather than on the basis of a specific cut-off score on one anxiety measure.

In Switzerland, an ethics committee and Swissmedic recently approved what will become the world's first study evaluating LSD's therapeutic benefits in over 35 years. Psychiatrist Peter Gasser, MD, will conduct LSD-assisted psychotherapy with subjects who are diagnosed with anxiety related to life-threatening illnesses, and will measure changes in anxiety and pain over the course of the treatment.

Another MAPS-sponsored study is testing the effectiveness of psilocybin-assisted psychotherapy in nine subjects

with anxiety associated with advanced stage melanoma cancer, under the direction of a team of physicians and mental health care professionals at a world-class cancer center. This study received FDA clearance in October, 2007. We will be able to disclose the names and institutional affiliations of the researchers after the study has received IRB approval. The researchers for this study have generously offered to volunteer their time, reducing overall costs significantly.

With the exception of Dr. Halpern's study, the studies described above are going to be conducted under MAPS' Investigational New Drug (IND) applications with the US FDA, a prerequisite for petitioning the FDA to approve the drugs as prescription medicines. Dr. Halpern's study is now independent of MAPS and has its own IND #, although the study does cross-reference MAPS' IND.

We at MAPS are pleased to be involved in these studies, and to be offering this unique opportunity to people for whom modern medicine has given up hope and society has, in many cases, cast aside. We will all be in the same place one day soon.

We are currently seeking \$250,000 in funding to carry out the current phase of our research with psychedelics and end-of-life issues. Please consider making a tax-deductible contribution to support these studies today. •