

Psilocybin as Medicine: An Update from The Heffter Research Institute

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THE HEFFTER RESEARCH INSTITUTE CONTINUES to make huge strides in our attempts to gather sufficient clinical data to support our goal of having the medical utility of psilocybin recognized so that it can be rescheduled and developed as a therapeutic agent.

As MAPS readers will recall, we have two ongoing clinical programs using psilocybin to alleviate the anxiety and depression that accompany a cancer diagnosis. One study is at New York University, under the direction of Dr. Steven Ross, where the cancer patients must have a terminal diagnosis. This study is an extension of the Heffter study that was undertaken and published by Dr. Charles Grob at UCLA. The NYU study is progressing very well now that patient recruitment issues have been solved. The other study is taking place at Johns Hopkins University under the direction of Dr. Roland Griffiths and is also moving along well. The Johns Hopkins study does not require patients to be terminal, but only to have anxiety and depression related to their cancer diagnosis.

We continue to support Dr. Franz Vollenweider's work at the Heffter Research Center, Zurich. Dr. Vollenweider is using state-of-the-art brain imaging and EEG techniques to understand how changes in brain chemistry are related to emotions and mental functions. Dr. Vollenweider has been the most productive scientist in the world carrying out basic clinical neuroscience involving the use of psychedelics, and has received numerous awards for his work. We are quite proud to include Dr. Vollenweider as a Heffter Board member. Readers can visit the National Library of Medicine (PubMed) and search for "Vollenweider,FX." to see the range of his accomplishments.

We are also supporting studies at Johns Hopkins University to examine the value of psilocybin in a smoking cessation program. A small pilot study has already demonstrated remarkable efficacy in helping long-time smokers quit smoking when all other approaches have failed.

Currently, a small pilot study of psilocybin in treating alcoholism is being carried out at the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, under the direction of



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Dr. Michael Bogenschutz. This study was planned before the recent meta-analysis was published showing that LSD had a significant effect in helping alcoholics return to sobriety. We are therefore optimistic that psilocybin will have an effect similar to LSD, which would allow us to move to a much larger study. If psilocybin can be shown to be effective in treating alcoholism, it would be a significant and major public health advance. Of course, as each study produces positive results, it allows us to show further that psychedelics have medical value, a finding necessary to moving psilocybin into a lower DEA schedule so that it can ultimately be used by physicians.

Finally, we note our support of preclinical studies in the laboratory of Dr. Charles Nichols, at the LSU Medical Center in New Orleans, where he is evaluating the potential of psychedelics to treat asthma. He had previously discovered that the hallucinogen known as DOI had remarkable potency in preventing the biochemical cascade of events that occurs during inflammatory processes. Many of the anecdotal reports of persons gaining relief from a variety of inflammatory and allergic conditions after taking a psychedelic might actually have a scientific basis.

There are a number of additional studies now in the plan-

ning stages. We encourage readers to visit our web site (heffter.org) and look at the list of research publications supported by the Institute over the past two decades. News items relevant to Institute activities are also posted there.

As an additional note, Heffter Board member Robert Barnhart (who also serves on the MAPS Board) is the executive producer of a new educational documentary about psychedelics titled *The Medicine: Science & Psychedelics*. A number of Heffter scientists are interviewed in the documentary. This is a not-for-profit project, and the producers are seeking additional funding to complete the project. Visit themedicinescienceandpsychedelics.com to learn more. ☀

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Founded in 1993, **The Heffter Research Institute** promotes research of the highest scientific quality with the classical hallucinogens and related compounds (sometimes called psychedelics) in order to contribute to a greater understanding of the mind leading to the improvement of the human condition, and to alleviate suffering. Learn more at heffter.org.