Introduction to a new psilocybin study

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Since the 1980s scientists have become intensely re-engaged in researching the basic questions of efficacy, side-effects and toxicity (i.e. in Europe: Gouzoulis, Hermle, Kovar, Vollenweider). Several projects have also begun or are planned on how psychedelics can be used as adjuncts to psychotherapy. A new German study with psilocybin is planned for next year. The influence of synthetic psilocybin (0.2 mg/kg bodyweight) on twenty-four physician volunteers will be explored using psychometric and other tests under special set and setting conditions. Ultimately, the objective of the research team is to explore the utility of psilocybin as an adjunct to psychotherapy and for the self-exploration and training of mental health professionals.

Hanscarl Leuner, the famous German psychiatrist, psychotherapist and former director of the European College for the Study of Consciousness (ECSC) researched psycholytic psychotherapy in the 1960s and 70s. After his official permission to use psychedelics as adjuncts to psychotherapy expired, he tried persistently to re-open the doors for research projects on psychedelics until his death in 1996. The roots of our project reach back to this effort; Leuner was the one who called us together in 1995. In this pilot study we have decided to work exclusively with healthy physicians, because, in Germany, it is much easier to get official permission to start research project with psychedelic substances on human beings when the subjects are medical professionals. These substances are strictly prohibited in Germany. Psychopathological, psychodynamic, pharmacokinetic and metabolic-toxicological examinations will be conducted. We want to make a contribution to the research on the paradigm of model-psychosis and to the biological and psychological research on substance-related dependency. In recent years the use of psychedelics in Europe and other industrialized countries has increased. Thus, the influence of special set and setting patterns on psychiatric and psychological aspects, on affectivity and the motivation for using/abusing psychedelics are other spheres of interest.

The research on the individual motivation for the consumption of psychedelics is of great scientific and public interest for public health and drug abuse prevention strategies. Psilocybin is not a so-called “designer drug,” but looking in at its effects, it is comparable. The simultaneous consumption of different psychoactive substances may occur because the motivation to use each drug may be similar in some aspects. The effects of psilocybin on the human body and mind are well known and it seems to be a very safe substance to study when investigating motivations for using psychoactive substances.

Conclusion:

In our viewpoint our project is a continuation of the research of Gouzoulis, Hermle, Kovar, Leuner, Spitzer and others. We are honored by the participation of our board of advisors: Prof. Dittrich, Dr. Hermle, Prof. Kovar and Prof. Scharfetter. It is encouraging to see the resumption of the impressive work of Stan Grof and others, who assisted “the human encounter with death” with psychedelics in the past. Looking at the Internet it seems as if there is a psychedelic research revival all over the world. The short acting designer psychedelics (for example CZ-74 and LE-25) are especially interesting, because of their ability to provide the positive aspects of psychedelic experiences with minimal negative side effects. I hope that we will be able to explore other new short acting psychedelics in the following years that could be useful as adjuncts to psychotherapy.

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Conclusions: Subjects receiving 150-250 mg/kg/day of psychotropic drugs were significantly more likely to have increased theophylline levels compared to the control group. The data suggest that psychotropic medications may interact with theophylline, potentially increasing the risk of toxicity. Further research is needed to explore these findings and determine if there are any clinical implications for patients taking this combination of therapies.