MONDAY, FEBRUARY 23 was not the beginning of just any old workweek, but an exciting and long-awaited day. On that day we facilitated the introduction of the first participant into an observational case series of the long-term efficacy of ibogaine-assisted therapy and associated interventions in participants with opiate addiction treated at the Iboga Therapy House (ITH) in Vancouver, Canada.

This MAPS-sponsored study is intended to gather information to evaluate whether ibogaine-assisted therapy helps opiate-dependent people stop using opiates, use less, or practice moderated use after the therapy. For one year after therapy we will be collecting data from participants in the study, enabling us to examine whether ibogaine-assisted therapy facilitates positive changes or improvements in quality of life that result in decreased harms associated with chronic or mismanaged opiate use.

The road to getting this study approved and started was a long one. The protocol was originally designed as an outcome study, but it was later changed to an observational case study when the institutional review board expressed concerns that the initial design was too similar to a clinical trial. After three years, enduring numerous setbacks, the study is finally under way.

The conception of the study began in 2003, when MAPS Clinical Research Associate Valerie Mojeiko visited the ITH facility in Vancouver. At that time, the ITH was providing free ibogaine therapy to substance-dependent individuals as a response to the general lack of detoxification and treatment options. The five-day residential program provided an alternative to largely ineffective standard treatment models and provided a therapy based on the principles of harm reduction, health promotion, and psychedelic therapy. MAPS recognized the unique opportunity to study the outcomes of such a therapy as a potentially important contribution to the data available on the therapeutic uses of ibogaine. Thus, we began the process of developing a protocol for a study that would examine ibogaine-assisted therapy's potential in reducing harm and facilitating positive, healthy lifestyle changes.

The protocol design for the study is based on two primary and five secondary hypotheses. The primary hypotheses are that: 1) the ITH treatment program will result in changes in substance use, including decreases in average post-treatment scores on the Addiction Severity Index, with scores averaged over a one-year period; 2) the ITH treatment program will result in extended periods of abstinence post-treatment as quantified by average number of days post-treatment without use of opiates, and also by average
Aside from providing symptomatic relief from withdrawal symptoms, ibogaine-assisted therapy can also provide psychotherapeutic benefits when used with proper intention in a safe and supportive environment.

For more information about the study, see the protocol on the MAPS Web site: maps.org/ibogaine. For more information about the Iboga Therapy House: see, ibogatherapyhouse.net.