

Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies **Summer, 1989**

23A Shaler Lane, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138, (617) 547-7271

by Rick Doblin

Switzerland Leads the Way

Great News! Finally, somewhere in the world, psychotherapeutic research with MDMA is taking place. About two years ago, over 30 Swiss psychiatrists interested in psychedelic psychotherapy and research formed the Swiss Psycholytic Association in order to formally request legal permission to use MDMA in treatment and research. In June of 1988, Swiss officials in the Office of Pharmaceuticals and Narcotics, of the Department of Public Health of the Ministry of the Interior, granted permission to six of the Association's psychiatrists to treat patients and conduct research not only with MDMA but also with LSD, mescaline, DMT, and 2CB. Psychiatric patients suffering from reactive depression, addictive disorders, character neuroses, phobias, psychosomatic illness, obsessive-compulsive disorders, and anorexia nervosa are being treated with MDMA-assisted psychotherapy, with very positive initial reports from both psychiatrists and patients. The Swiss psychiatrists have been told they will be permitted to administer these drugs for the next year or two, but in order to continue their work beyond that time will be required to show scientific data supporting their view that the drugs are both safe and efficacious.

In May of 1989, I went to Switzerland to observe the Swiss experience with regulated psychedelic research as part of my work towards a Masters in Public Policy at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. The report I wrote was submitted for critique to U.S. officials in the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA). Being here at the Kennedy School learning to be a bureaucrat (or at least think like one!) has provided me with an insightful training in governmental decision making, and remarkable opportunities to engage the present drug policy officials in dialogue. The fact that hundreds of patients have been successfully treated with MDMA in Switzerland strengthens the circumstantial case for research into the therapeutic use of MDMA.

MDMA Research in the United States

In response to the estimated 400,000 doses of MDMA that are consumed in the United States every month (my estimate based on DEA seizures, and gossip), NIDA has decided to thoroughly evaluate the possible harm that may be caused by human use of MDMA. Eight university-based researchers are conducting NIDA-funded research on the neurological effects of MDMA and serotonin, while NIMH also has funded some basic neurotoxicity research.

One of NIDA's multi-year grants has gone to Dr. George Ricaurte of Johns Hopkins University for basic animal research. Dr. Ricaurte's primate study is investigating the mechanism by which damaged serotonin nerve terminals regenerate, and determining how long such regeneration takes, whether it will restore baseline levels, and whether