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# U.S. may lift 'ban' on LSD testing

## Experts tell FDA some hallucinogens may aid alcoholics, terminally ill and psychiatric patients

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STATES NEWS SERVICE

WASHINGTON — Faced with evidence that some illicit hallucinogenic drugs may benefit certain patients, the federal government is on the verge of lifting its near-ban on experiments with such drugs as LSD and Ecstasy for therapeutic purposes.

The push to re-evaluate the government's policy has come from researchers who contend that under carefully controlled conditions, hallucinogens have been shown to benefit the terminally ill, alcoholics and some psychiatric patients.

In effect, researchers want to pick up where these studies left off years ago, when hallucinogenic drugs became embroiled in controversies that virtually ended research on them.

During the 1940s and '50s, studies on hallucinogens were frequently performed with approval and funding from the Food and Drug Administration, said Dr. John Buckman, a University of Virginia psychiatrist who performed several such experiments in England and the United States in the '50s and '60s.

But some of the studies that

## FDA may lift tests with LSD, Ecstasy

took place in those years — notably Army tests with LSD on unwitting soldiers — helped discredit the field, and research came to a virtual halt when authorities moved to outlaw hallucinogens in the late 1960s.

Timothy Leary, the former Harvard Medical School doctor who became famous for taking LSD and encouraging everyone else to do the same, is responsible for "the death of research" into such drugs, said Dr. Lewis Seiden of the University of Chicago. Seiden is among those who say hallucinogens may benefit some patients.

The FDA couldn't pinpoint the number of hallucinogen experiments it had allowed since the late '60s, but said it was fewer than five.

### Changing climate

Now, however, the agency is listening to scientists who say the time has come to open up research into hallucinogens.

"I think the FDA is beginning to look at (drug studies) as a means to helping people," said Corinne Moody, an FDA consumer safety officer.

The FDA's drug abuse advisory committee met with several researchers July 15 to lay down standards and study areas for future research.

Some researchers say terminally ill patients are among those who can benefit from hallucinogens.

Buckman said LSD had been given to terminal cancer patients by researchers overseas and in U.S. trials before the late '60s, with noteworthy results. The drug not only "abolished pain," Buckman said, but produced "a religious experience" that "alleviated patients' fears of pain and dying."

Hallucinogens like Ecstasy and LSD also have been shown to have a value in treating alcoholics, overseas studies indicate.

When used infrequently in conjunction with therapy, hallucinogens "can give people a fundamentally transformative experience," which may help them gain strength to stop drinking, said Rick Doblin, a Harvard graduate student study-

ing hallucinogens.

### Drunks quit, for a while

Buckman cited a Baltimore study of "very chronic" skid row alcoholics who were given LSD in the 1960s. The subjects were under the influence of the drug for about eight hours. Many reported a reduction in depression related to the "religious" experience the drug induced, Buckman said.

Some of the alcoholics were able to abstain for several months, although all eventually began to drink again, Buckman said.

The third and perhaps most controversial group researchers say hallucinogens may help is psychiatric patients.

Experts stress that patients must be carefully selected and that the drug should be used only a few times as an adjunct to psychotherapy.

Doblin, working with Dr. Charles Grob of the UC Medical Center in Orange, is expecting FDA approval within weeks for a study administering Ecstasy to terminal cancer patients and practicing psychiatrists. The latter group will test the drug for its suitability for psychiatric patients.

Exactly which patients the drugs can help is not clear. Buckman says hallucinogens have been used to help patients relive traumatic experiences that happened in early childhood.

Rape victims and veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder are also potential beneficiaries, Doblin said. Such patients can "end up reliving the experience and healing," Doblin said.

### Caution urged

Some experts urge caution in assessing the potential benefits of hallucinogens.

"For the sake of public health and for the sake of good science, you need to have solid evidence to substantiate claims" that the drugs can help certain patients, said Geraldine Lin of the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

Lin considers claims that hallucinogens can be beneficial to certain patients premature until careful, clinical studies by qualified researchers are performed on human patients.

FDA's approval in principle of MDMA research was reported internationally on CNN, nationally on NBC radio, on page 1 of the San Francisco Examiner, and in other papers around the United States.