

THE NICARAGUA PROJECT: MDMA IN THE TREATMENT OF POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER RELATED TO WAR TRAUMA

I AM ESPECIALLY PROUD to be able to announce a new MAPS project that has not previously been mentioned in the MAPS newsletter. This project will help evaluate the safety and effectiveness of MDMA-assisted psychotherapy in the treatment of patients suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) caused by war-related trauma. The project is being carried out under the direction of Dr. Manuel Marin Madriz, chief psychiatrist at the Military Hospital in Managua. Permission for the study has been obtained from the Nicaraguan Minister of Health, as well as from all the relevant hospital authorities. PTSD is a profound psychological disorder. Many

therapists experienced with the use of MDMA believe that it can be especially effective in treating PTSD, even if patients have failed to find relief from more conventional therapies. MDMA-assisted psychotherapy reportedly has the potential to enable people to process difficult emotions more effectively than they might otherwise do, and can help patients move beyond being tormented by their past trauma. Though LSD has very different subjective qualities than MDMA, Dutch psychiatrist Dr. Hans Bastiaans' use of LSD for decades in the treatment of concentration camp survivors is an inspiring example of the beneficial use of psychedelics in the treatment of people with severe trauma.

When I founded MAPS in 1986, it was precisely to help facilitate research projects like this one. It gives me great satisfaction that MAPS is helping to coordinate the training of the Nicaraguan therapeutic team, the development of the scientific protocol, the implementation of the study, and is also assuming primary responsibility for funding the project. This project is what MAPS' members make possible.

The Advisory Team

MAPS has obtained the help of a remarkable group of psychiatric and psychotherapeutic advisors for this project. Experts who will share their approach to the therapeutic use of MDMA with the Nicaraguan researchers include Dr. Claudio Naranjo, the pioneering psychiatrist from Chile who first researched the therapeutic uses of MDA and MMDA; Richard Yensen, Ph.D., a psychedelic researcher whose dissertation was on the therapeutic use of MDA (and who also speaks Spanish); and Dr. George Greer, author of a paper on his therapeutic use of MDMA in 28 patients before MDMA was placed in Schedule 1.

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MAPS is also assembling an outstanding team of experts in the study of post-traumatic stress who will help in the design of the study. MAPS has been very fortunate to obtain the help of Sylvia Garma, Ph.D., who works at the San Francisco VA Medical Center. She is originally from Argentina and was recently part of a State Department -coordinated visit to El Salvador designed to assist the Salvadoran Health Authorities in studying and improving their treatments for post-traumatic stress. MAPS is also seeking to obtain the assistance of one of the foremost academic experts on PTSD who previously studied under Dr. Hans Bastiaans, as well as a psychiatrist who specializes in treating PTSD patients.

The next issue of the MAPS newsletter will report more fully on this project. It is possible that some of MAPS' therapeutic experts will visit Nicaragua in February or March to begin sharing their expertise with the Nicaraguan researchers. The study should take about a year or so to conduct, and will cost about \$30,000. Contributions earmarked for this project are most welcome. ■