



BECKLEY
FOUNDATION

WHY SCIENCE NEEDS PSYCHEDELICS:
A PARADIGM SHIFT FOR PSYCHIATRY

AMANDA FEILDING

5TH MEETING OF THE WORLD CONGRESS FOR FREEDOM OF SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH
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I am so sorry not to be able to be with you today at this important event.

We are now living in a world where modern society is entering a mental health epidemic.

In the UK, 1 in 4 people are affected by mental illness. 1 in 3 teenage girls suffer from an anxiety or depressive disorder, and suicide is the leading cause of death among the young. Nearly 50% of the population will develop a mental health issue at some point during their lifetime; and the World Health Organisation has declared that *depression* is the leading cause of disability. Mental illness costs the UK economy an estimated £100 billion pounds every year.

The number of antidepressants prescribed in England has more than doubled in the last decade, with the most common treatment being SSRIs. Of the 30% of non-responders, 15% *will commit suicide*. It is surprising that no major breakthrough in drug development for depression and other psychological disorders has happened in the past three decades, since the discovery of SSRIs.

In the last 20 years research from the Beckley Foundation and others, has found that psychedelics, such as psilocybin and LSD, can produce dramatically higher rates of efficacy than any other available treatments. They work immediately after a single or a few doses, with benefits lasting weeks, months and maybe longer with no negative or long-term side-effects.

Psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy could create a truly revolutionary paradigm shift in psychiatry. If it wasn't for repressively restrictive regulations psychedelic-assisted therapy could be made available in clinics right away.

LSD was considered a new *wonder-drug* when it first appeared in the 1950's. Hundreds of published papers and thousands of patients reports testified to its promise for a wide range of illnesses.

But when in the 1960s LSD escaped the labs into the wider world and inspired a cultural revolution, which included opposition to the Vietnam War, the US government panicked. This resulted in the UN classifying LSD and the psychedelics as *Schedule 1 drugs*, i.e., those substances with **no** medical value and the **highest** potential for harm. This resulted in the strictest control, which effectively blocked scientific research into the therapeutic value of these compounds for the next 40 years.

In 1998, I set up the Beckley Foundation with the dual aims of firstly, researching the potential of these compounds to heal illness and enhance well-being and secondly, to reform global drug policies. It was clear that the prohibitionist approach had *not* succeeded in its aims, and was causing *devastating* collateral damage: including ill-health, violence, corruption, death and vast cost. The UN conventions, orchestrated by the US, and signed by over 180 countries worldwide, also resulted in the obstruction of scientific research into the therapeutic promise of cannabis and the psychedelics, thereby depriving patients of a most valuable tool for healing.

Within my own work, I would like to draw attention to just three studies which illustrate the vast potential of psychedelics to form the basis of a paradigm shift in psychiatry.

The first being a pilot study with Johns Hopkins University, which used psilocybin-assisted psychotherapy as an aid to overcoming treatment-resistant addiction to nicotine – which causes over 5 million deaths a year at the global level. This study had a remarkable 80% success rate of complete abstinence at six months post-treatment, which is much higher than any other available treatment.

The second study was part of the *Beckley/Imperial Research Programme*, and investigated *psilocybin-assisted psychotherapy as a means to treat depression*. After two sessions, a dramatic 67% of patients were depression-free after one week, and 42% remained so after three months. These patients had suffered from treatment-resistant depression for an average of 18 years.

The third set of studies I would like to draw attention to are the neuroimaging studies we undertook as part of the *Beckley/Imperial Research Programme*, which explore the mechanisms underlying the changing states of consciousness brought about by psilocybin and LSD.

One of the most striking effects we observed was a decrease in activity within the default-mode network (the DMN), a collection of widespread brain areas that work together to control consciousness and maintain a sense of self. The DMN disintegrates under LSD and psilocybin, producing the subjective experience of 'ego dissolution'. Such weakening of the censorship normally exerted by the DMN also allows for a dramatic increase in *connectivity* between other areas of the brain, and the emergence of a more complex, less predictable, and

more *flexible* state of consciousness. In this more fluid, 'plastic' state long-lasting changes can take place, repressed memories can be accessed, and the rigid and maladaptive thought patterns which underlie psychologically disturbed behaviours like depression, addiction and anxiety can be **reset**.

I, and others, consider these compounds have shown an amazing propensity to heal and to be **non-specific medications**. Studies elsewhere have indicated equal promise for psychedelics in the treatment of PTSD, OCD, and anxiety. I truly believe psychedelics can lead us towards a new path which could revolutionise psychiatry.

However, the present global prohibition of these compounds, laid out in the UN Drug Conventions in 1971 remain to this day unchanged, although our knowledge of the science and the potential value of these compounds to heal, has advanced considerably – an appalling state of affairs. We need to *facilitate* research into the potential value of psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy, and, if it is proven successful, open clinics where patients can be treated, reducing both the suffering and the heavy financial burden of mental illness.

Our first step must be to **reschedule** cannabis and the classic psychedelics from **Schedule 1** to **Schedule 2**, so that research can be carried out much more easily, and doctors can prescribe to those in need. Let us put health, and the reduction of suffering ahead of political expediency and rigid-thinking: **the time to act is now**.