

# Psychedelic-Assisted Therapy – A Modern Approach to Mental Health Treatment

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**Abstract - Psychedelic-assisted therapy (PAT) has started being recognized as a potential treatment approach for various psychiatric conditions, including depression, post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and substance abuse disorders. In this review, we focus on the appreciative inquiry approach with the history of therapeutic psychedelics, the neuropsychobiological parts of it, and the clinical application of psychedelics in medicine. Clinical trials of psilocybin, MDMA, and ketamine, have generally shown a high degree of effectiveness, producing both rapid and long lasting symptom mitigation where traditional methods have failed. The therapies have been made possible through steps such as increase in neuroplasticity, change in the pattern of serotonin receptor interaction, and processing of emotion and memory. In addition, the provided patient-centered therapeutic environment is essential for an effective and safe therapeutic process. These findings, which are novel to many practitioners, bring up new challenges. The barriers of regulation, risk ethics, and the insufficiency of treatment guidelines pose significant concern. Research is still ongoing on these treatments to develop better models, broaden accessibility, and minimize risks. Mental healthcare can be transformed with the use of PAT as these new methods can assist with disorders that are hard to treat. This review synthesizes current findings and discusses future directions, emphasizing the importance of continued research, policy advancements, and clinical integration to maximize the therapeutic benefits of psychedelics.**

## INTRODUCTION

The challenges of mental health are still a considerable burden to the globe and many patients within the system do not respond to conventional methods of treatment [1]. Psychedelic substances such as psilocybin, MDMA, and even LSD are being considered again because of their potential usefulness in improving the results of therapy [2]. The growing interest in psychedelics stems from the fact that these substances seem to relieve symptoms in treatment

resistant patients in a matter of hours and days instead of weeks after using standard medications [3]. In this article, we consider current gaps of knowledge regarding research, therapeutic mechanisms, and other issues within the world of PAT.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Indigenous communities in South America and Africa have utilized psychedelics for hundreds of years as a means of healing. Clinical studies during the mid 1900s looked into its uses in psychiatry but, like most other research, was stopped when the Controlled Substances Act of 1970 was enforced [5]. Specific policies that were made more recently, combined with progressive FDA designations, have sparked curiosity in their ability to heal, which has resulted in an increase in clinical studies and academic research surrounding the topic [6].

## MECHANISM OF ACTION

Psychedelics impact the human body by enhancing the activity of serotonin 5-HT<sub>2A</sub> receptors leading to increased plasticity in the human nervous system and producing changes in perception, as well as emotions [7]. Research suggests that psychedelics can assist in breaking self-defeating behavioral patterns and aiding deep therapeutic cognition when employed in a therapy setting [8]. Specifically, functional neuroimaging studies reveal that psychedelics decrease the activity of certain areas in the brain that is commonly known as the default mode network (DMN) responsible for self-focused and introspective thinking that is often overly repetitive and negative [9].

### CLINICAL APPLICATIONS

1. Depression: Clinical trials indicate that psilocybin-assisted therapy may provide rapid and sustained antidepressant effects in treatment-resistant cases [10,11]. A study by Carhart-Harris et al. (2021) found that psilocybin produced superior results compared to escitalopram, a conventional SSRI [12].
2. PTSD: MDMA-assisted therapy has demonstrated significant efficacy in reducing PTSD symptoms, with Phase 3 trials showing promising results [13,14]. The mechanism is believed to involve MDMA's ability to reduce fear responses and enhance emotional processing [15].
3. Substance Use Disorders: Psychedelics such as psilocybin and ibogaine have shown potential in reducing addiction severity and promoting long-term abstinence [16,17]. A trial on psilocybin-assisted smoking cessation therapy reported an 80% abstinence rate after six months, compared to traditional nicotine replacement therapies [18].
4. End-of-Life Anxiety: Psilocybin has been used to alleviate existential distress in terminally ill patients, enhancing emotional well-being and acceptance [19,20]. Participants in controlled trials reported improved quality of life and reduced depressive symptoms after a single psilocybin session [21].

### NURSING PERSPECTIVE

Nurses play a crucial role in the implementation and success of psychedelic-assisted therapy. Their responsibilities include patient preparation, monitoring, and post-treatment integration. Nurses ensure a safe and supportive environment, helping patients navigate the altered states of consciousness induced by psychedelics. Additionally, they provide emotional support, facilitate therapeutic communication, and collaborate with interdisciplinary teams to optimize patient outcomes [16].

Key nursing considerations include:

- Patient Education: Educating patients on the expected effects of psychedelics and addressing concerns regarding safety and efficacy.

- Monitoring: Observing physiological and psychological responses to ensure patient safety during therapy sessions.
- Ethical Considerations: Ensuring informed consent and adherence to ethical guidelines regarding patient autonomy and well-being.
- Aftercare Support: Assisting patients in integrating their psychedelic experiences into their daily lives through counseling and follow-up care.

By incorporating a holistic and patient-centered approach, nurses contribute significantly to the effectiveness of psychedelic-assisted therapy and enhance the overall therapeutic experience.

### CHALLENGES AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Despite promising findings, challenges remain in integrating PAT into mainstream medicine. Issues such as legal restrictions, risk of adverse effects, and the need for highly trained therapists must be addressed [22]. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and patient safety, are critical to responsible implementation [23]. The potential for misuse outside of clinical settings also necessitates stringent regulatory frameworks [24].

### FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Ongoing research aims to refine dosing protocols, expand therapeutic indications, and explore the long-term effects of psychedelic treatment. Advances in neuroscience may further elucidate the underlying mechanisms, paving the way for personalized psychedelic therapies. Researchers are also exploring microdosing regimens, in which sub-perceptual doses of psychedelics are taken regularly to enhance cognitive function and emotional resilience.

### CONCLUSION

Psychedelic-assisted therapy represents a novel and potentially revolutionary approach to mental health treatment. While challenges remain, growing clinical evidence supports its efficacy and safety when administered in a controlled setting. Continued

research and policy reform will be crucial in harnessing its full therapeutic potential.

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