

# Hallucinogen can safely ease anxiety in advanced-stage cancer patients: study

6 September 2010

In the first human study of its kind to be published in more than 35 years, researchers found psilocybin, an hallucinogen which occurs naturally in "magic mushrooms," can safely improve the moods of patients with advanced-stage cancer and anxiety, according to an article published online today in the *Archives of General Psychiatry*.

Patients enrolled in the study at the Los Angeles Biomedical Research Institute at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center (LA BioMed) demonstrated improvement of mood and reduction of [anxiety](#) up to six months after undergoing treatment, with significance reached at the six-month point on the "Beck Depression Inventory" and at one and three months on the "State-Trait Anxiety Inventory." A third screening tool, the "Profile of Mood States," identified mood improvement after treatment that approached but did not reach significance.

"We are working with a patient population that often does not respond well to conventional treatments," said Charles S. Grob, MD, an LA BioMed principal investigator who led the research team. "Following their treatments with psilocybin, the patients and their families reported benefit from the use of this hallucinogen in reducing their anxiety. This study shows psilocybin can be administered safely, and that further investigation of hallucinogens should be pursued to determine their potential benefits."

Researchers conducted extensive investigations of psychedelic drugs in the 1950s and 1960s and found promising improvements in mood and anxiety, as well as a diminished need for narcotic pain medication among advanced-stage [cancer patients](#). The research was abandoned in the early 1970s in the wake of widespread recreational usage that led to stiff federal laws regulating hallucinogens.

"Political and cultural pressures forced an end to these studies in the 1970s," said Dr. Grob. "We

were able to revive this research under strict federal supervision and demonstrate that this is a field of study with great promise for alleviating anxiety and other psychiatric symptoms."

The LA BioMed study is the first research publication in several decades to examine the hallucinogen treatment model with advanced-cancer anxiety. Twelve volunteers, ages 36 to 58, with advanced-stage cancer and anxiety were given a moderate dose of 0.2 mg/kg of psilocybin and, on a separate occasion, a placebo. Neither the volunteers nor the researchers monitoring them knew whether they'd been given a placebo or psilocybin.

The two experimental sessions took place several weeks apart in a hospital clinical research unit at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center, where Dr. Grob is a professor of psychiatry. The research volunteers were monitored for the six hours following their dose. The volunteers were encouraged to lie in bed, wear eye shades and listen to music during the first few hours after ingesting the medication or the placebo. They were interviewed after the six-hour session and over the next six months to assess the outcome of the treatment.

**More information:** *Arch Gen Psychiatry*.

Published online September 6, 2010.

doi:10.1001/archgenpsychiatry.2010.116

Provided by Los Angeles Biomedical Research Institute at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center

APA citation: Hallucinogen can safely ease anxiety in advanced-stage cancer patients: study (2010, September 6) retrieved 6 June 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2010-09-hallucinogen-safely-ease-anxiety-advanced-stage.html>

*This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.*