

Contact: Patricia Aidem

661 755-1322

Patricia.Aidem@Providence.org

Immersive nature videos may enhance psychedelic-assisted therapy for alcohol addiction, according to research by Providence Saint John's Pacific Neuroscience Institute and renowned filmmaker Louie Schwartzberg

SANTA MONICA (Sept. 21, 2023) – Researchers at Providence Saint John's Health Center have found that a dose of nature from a noted Hollywood filmmaker could be beneficial in the clinical use of psilocybin to treat alcohol use disorder.

Findings published this week in [Frontiers in Psychiatry](#) indicate the 20 subjects who took part in the small trial at [Pacific Neuroscience Institute's Treatment & Research In Psychedelics Center](#) – known as TRIP – overall were calmer and better able to ease into psilocybin-assisted therapy when they participated in the nature-themed immersive video experience during their treatment.

Researchers also demonstrated the immersive video during the onset of the psychedelic experience was safe and well-tolerated.

More significantly, overall there were major reductions in alcohol use and alcohol problems during the 14-week study, but long-term follow-up is necessary to determine the durability of this treatment approach. Post-psilocybin blood pressure increases were significantly less in sessions where participants were randomly assigned to watch the nature-themed video at the start of the psilocybin session.

“Many who have taken psilocybin outside of medical settings choose a place out in nature, a connection to the outside world,” said addiction medicine specialist [Keith Heinzerling, M.D.](#), principal investigator of the study, noting that PNI does not endorse illegal psilocybin use outside of clinical trials. “Can you alter someone's consciousness to improve health by being in harmony with nature? It's hard to do a clinical trial out in the forest, although we considered it.”

Instead, the team brought nature into the clinic by incorporating “Visual Healing,” nature-themed videos by award-winning filmmaker [Louie Schwartzberg](#), at the start of the psychedelic session.

“We manipulated the setting with Louie's beautiful and calming video, hypothesizing it could provide a better starting point for participants' psychedelic journey, which can at times be challenging,” said neurosurgeon [Daniel Kelly, M.D.](#), PNI director and founder, and co-investigator of the study. “And in fact, the lower blood pressure, and the subjective reports of patients in the “Visual Healing” group suggests the video did have this beneficial effect. To our knowledge, this approach to psychedelic-assisted therapy has never been done before.”

For more than 40 years, Schwartzberg's awe-inspiring films, including “Fantastic Fungi,” have enlightened and inspired through magnificent scenes found only in nature.

“Psychedelic journeys are intended to be transformational experiences,” Schwartzberg said. “Whether people have addiction, cancer, anxiety or they’re facing end of life, the beauty of nature is healing. My films take people on journeys through time and scale.

“This is not something you would normally see if you took a walk in the forest,” he added. “This inspires you to look more closely. You have more ‘aha’ moments. It allows that introspection to occur.”

Naturally occurring psychedelics such as psilocybin (the active ingredient in magic mushrooms) have been used in healing ceremonies for thousands of years and over the last two decades in an ever-increasing number of controlled clinical trials. Although still not FDA-approved for clinical use, in these more recent trials, psilocybin and other psychedelics medicines including MDMA, have shown promise and a high degree of safety for a range of mental health conditions including depression, anxiety, substance use disorders and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Since 2019, PNI researchers at the [TRIP Center](#) have been studying the use of psychedelics such as psilocybin and LSD to treat mental health issues including addiction. This recent study was funded by donations from the [Saint John’s Health Center Foundation](#), the Annenberg Foundation and the [PNI Foundation](#). The [Usona Institute](#) provided pharmaceutical-grade psilocybin capsules for the study.

In this pilot study, patients were randomized into two cohorts, one of which had access to the nature video during their first psilocybin session. One to two weeks after preparatory counseling sessions, all participants received 25 mg psilocybin therapy and underwent a supervised psilocybin journey in the tranquil setting of the PNI TRIP Clinic room. Four weeks later, the cohorts had their second psilocybin journey with the option to view “Visual Healing” again at the onset of their psilocybin journey. Follow-up weekly integration and alcohol counseling sessions allowed participants to address and, hopefully, find meaning in their psychedelic journeys to help resolve longstanding alcohol use-related issues.

Acknowledging the need for further study on optimizing set and setting in psychedelic-assisted therapy, the PNI research team determined “Visual Healing” has potential to reduce the cardiovascular risks of psychedelic therapy, assist patients in feeling more relaxed and prepared for their psychedelic session without interfering with the psychedelic experience or alcohol-related treatment outcomes. They conclude that such nature-themed immersive videos may hold promise in advancing the field of psychedelic-based therapies.

For more information about the Pacific Treatment & Research In Psychedelics Center at PNI, visit pacificTRIP.org.