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Psychedelic Therapy Training and Education: What are the Challenges in 2021?

Janis Phelps, PhD., Director

Center for Psychedelic Therapies and Research

California Institute of Integral Studies

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Disclosures

Neither I nor my spouse/partner has a relevant financial relationship with a commercial interest to disclose.

Purpose of Academic Training Programs in Psychedelics

- Demand for public education on risk minimization with psychedelic usage
- Upsurge of clinical & public interest in last 10 years
- Need for clinicians trained in this modality
- Demonstrated therapeutic efficacy for several medical indications

Elements of a Training Curriculum

- Training in FDA-approved legal psychedelic research and therapy
- Academically accredited post-graduate training
- For licensed and ordained mental health and medical trainees (MAs to MDs)

Typical Eligibility for Training

- Clinical and Counseling Psychologists
- Physicians and Psychiatrists
- Ordained/Commissioned Clergy and Chaplains
- Registered Nurses and Nurse Practitioners
- Naturopathic Doctors
- Physician Assistants
- Licensed Professional Clinical Counselors
- Marriage and Family Therapists and Clinical Social Workers
- Occupational Therapists
- Advanced Alcohol and Drug Counselors
- Traditional Chinese Medicine practitioners
- Physical Therapists

Goals of Psychedelic Therapist Training

Training should strive to encompass all aspects of learning:

- intellectual/didactic
- process and experiential work
- applied (clinical and pastoral service)

Effects of Decriminalization and Legalization in Cities, Counties, and States

Questions for Now and Future:

- How to protect public safety?
- How to rapidly educate the general public on safe set and setting with these medicines?
- How to train more therapists and more efficiently while upholding high standards?

Challenges for Training Initiatives

- Expansion of training programs to sites across the country
- Licensed curricular material to share with other universities
- FDA-approved training research for students in psilocybin and MDMA-assisted sessions
- Online Public Education programs on risk mitigation for psychedelics, particularly in decriminalized regions

Need for Diversity Among Psychedelic Therapists

The field especially needs trained professionals who:

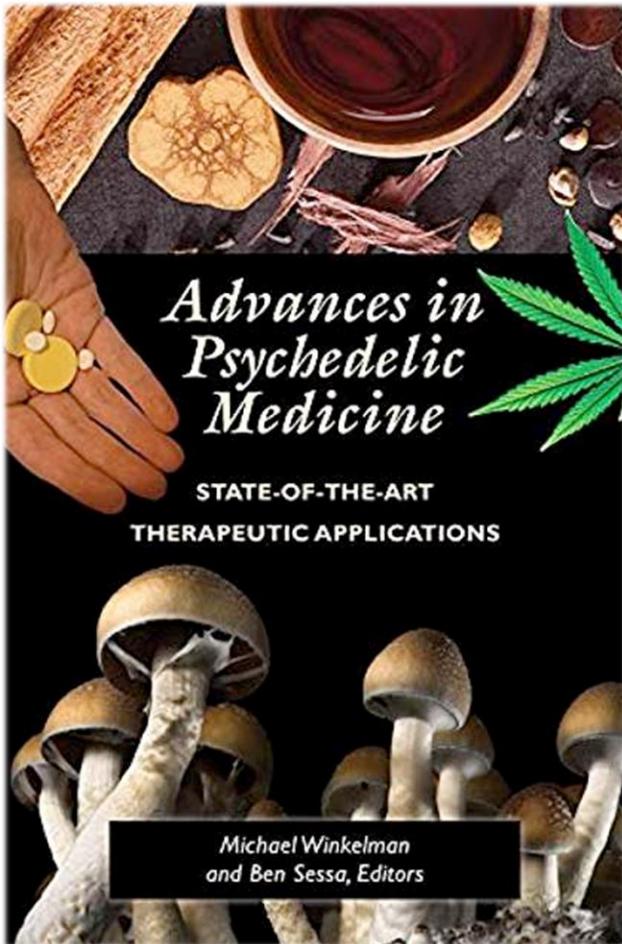
- Are military veterans
- Identify as LGBTQi and/or People of Color
- Are women
- Serve marginalized and under-represented populations

Training Learning Objectives

- To have knowledge of psychedelic research design
- To understand the science of psychedelics in therapy and healing
- To understand foundations of the neuroscience and pharmacology of psychedelics
- To develop skills in psychotherapy for participants in clinical psychedelic research
- To attain competence in appropriate set and settings for psychedelic research

[From Phelps, J. (2017). Developing Guidelines and Competencies for the Training of Psychedelic Therapists. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 57(5) 450–487.]

Guidelines for CIIS Training



Article

Developing Guidelines and Competencies for the Training of Psychedelic Therapists

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Janis Phelps¹

Abstract

Research since the 1950s has shown that psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy has had significant positive effects in reductions of specific clinical symptoms and increases in quality of life as measured on a variety of indices. The intensity of focus on evidence-based outcomes, however, has resulted in a paucity of active discussions and research on the core competencies of the therapists themselves. The context of the history of psychedelic research reveals how this neglect of therapist variables occurred. With current discussions of Phase 3 and expanded access research programs for psilocybin-assisted and MDMA-assisted psychotherapies, there will be a great need for competent therapists trained in this clinical specialty. This is particularly the case if less restricted, legal medical use is approved within the next 6 to 10 years. This article is the first review and compilation of psychedelic therapist competencies derived from the psychedelic literature. These six therapist competencies are empathetic abiding presence; trust enhancement; spiritual intelligence; knowledge of the physical and psychological effects of psychedelics; therapist self-awareness and ethical integrity; and proficiency in complementary techniques. A further contribution of this review is a delineation of the 12 fundamental curricular domains of study for the training and development of these therapist competencies. As current legal restrictions evolve, aspects of these training guidelines will develop accordingly.

¹California Institute of Integral Studies, San Francisco, CA, USA

Corresponding Author:

Janis Phelps, California Institute of Integral Studies, 1453 Mission Street, San Francisco, CA 94103, USA.
Email: jphelps@ciis.edu



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Therapist Competencies in 60 Years of Scholarly Literature

- An empathetic abiding presence
- Trust enhancement
- Transpersonal awareness
- Knowledge of the physical and psychological effects of psychedelics
- Therapist self-awareness and ethical integrity
- Proficiency in complementary techniques

Empathetic Abiding Presence

- Composure
- Evenly suspended attention
- Mindfulness
- Empathetic listening
- “Doing by non-doing”
- Responding to distress with calmness
- Equanimity

Our research nurse and I did our best to practice meditation while with our volunteers: watching the breath, being alert, eyes open, ready to respond, keeping a bright attitude, and getting out of the way of the volunteer’s experience.

(Strassman, 2002, p. 117)

Trust Enhancement

A good therapeutic relationship helps the patient to let go of psychological defenses, surrender to the experience, and endure the difficult periods of sessions characterized by intense physical and emotional suffering or confusion. The quality of the therapeutic relationship is essential for working through the most crucial situations in psychedelic therapy, the crisis of trust.

(Grof, 1980, p. 90)

Transpersonal Awareness

All the researchers therefore ended up at least sympathetic to and, in several cases deeply committed to, a spiritual worldview.

(Walsh and Grob, 2006, p. 438)

Spiritual intelligence goes beyond conventional psychological development. In addition to self-awareness, it implies awareness of our relationship to the transcendent, to each other, to the earth and all beings.

(Vaughan, 2002, p. 18)

Knowledge of the Physical and Psychological Effects of Psychedelics

- Knowledge of the anthropology of shamanism, neurobiology, neuropharmacology and drug dispositions
- Skills in the creation of safe and artful sets and settings
- Subjective, embodied knowledge from experience of personal psychedelic-assisted therapy

Therapist Ethical Integrity

- Maintain healthy therapeutic boundaries at all times
- Work within the scope of practice for their discipline
- Create a strong self-care program, particularly for effects of secondary trauma

The client sets the goals for her/himself, the therapist accepts those goals and accepts the fact that only the client can achieve them.

(Fisher and Martin, 1969, p. 69)

Proficiency in Complementary Techniques

Therapeutic body work and touch

(Eisner and Cohen, 1958; Johnson et al. 2008; Mithoefer, 2016)

Mindfulness-Based Therapies (Abramson, 1967; Richards, 2016)

Bonny Method of Guide Imagery and Music (GIM) and expressive arts therapy (Bonny and Savary, 1973; Usona, 2016)

Felt sensing and focusing (Danforth, 2009)

Training Curricular Modules

- Psychedelic Research, Neuroscience & Pharmacology
- Practices for Transformation of Consciousness
- Therapist Competencies & Therapeutic Processes
- En Vivo & Archival Instruction
- Mentoring & Professional Development

Highlights of the Curricular Modules

Research Foundations

- Renaissance in Research: Psychedelic Medicine Assisted Therapy
- Pharmacology & Neuroscience
- Legal Issues and Regulatory Processes
- Contemporary Clinical Research of Heffter Research Institute, MAPS and Beckley Foundation
- Ethical Values for Guides & Researchers

Highlights of the Curricular Modules

Practices for Transformation of Consciousness

- Sacraments, Wisdom Traditions & Mystical Experiences
- Psychedelics & Entactogens: Community, Spirituality & Wellness
- Anthropology of Shamanism

Highlights of the Curricular Modules

Therapist Competencies & Therapeutic Processes

- Core Competencies & Healing Presence of Therapist Guide
- Meaning Making: Preparation
- Safety Issues and Support Skills
- Acute Distress: Challenging Processes & Adverse Effects
- Integration: Practices & Goals

Highlights of the Curricular Modules

Experience of Guiding & Being Guided

- Two Holotropic Breathwork weekends
- Guided Imagery, Expressive Artwork & Self-Hypnosis
- Traditional Trance Inductions: Drumming & Rattling
- Planned: Clinical trial with psychedelics for the trainees

Highlights of the Curricular Modules

En Vivo & Archival Instruction

- Observation and discussion of specific MAPS and Heffter session videos
- Role-play practice in dyadic clinical scenarios

Highlights of the Curricular Modules

Mentoring & Professional Development

- Mentor Relationship
- Individualized Supplemental Training

It is my great concern to separate psychedelics from the ongoing debates about drugs, and to highlight the potential inherent to these substances for self-awareness, as an adjunct in therapy, and for fundamental research into the human mind.

It is my wish that a modern Eleusis will emerge, in which seeking humans can learn to have transcendent experiences with sacred substances in a safe setting.

I am convinced that these soul-opening, mind-revealing substances will find their appropriate place in our society and our culture.

~ Albert Hofmann, in a letter from April, 2007

What ground did we just cover?

- Current Challenges to Training
- Training Eligibility
- Curricular Goals and Learning Objectives
- Therapist Competencies
- Content and Modality Domains
- Next Steps:
Scaling up academic training programs across U.S.

*I have no doubt whatever that most people live,
whether physically, intellectually or morally,
in a very restricted circle of their potential being.*

*They make use of a very small portion of their possible consciousness...much like a
<person> who, out of their whole bodily organism,
should get into a habit of using only one's little finger...*

We all have reservoirs of life to draw upon, of which we do not dream.

~ William James



THANK YOU

Dr. Janis Phelps, Director
Center for Psychedelic Therapies and Research
www.ciis.edu/cptr

For our program reading list and other info:
Dr. Laura Pustarfi: lpustarfi@ciis.edu