

Balancing Access and Safety in the Field of Psychedelic Therapy

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Abstract

The field of psychedelic therapy has been gaining traction in recent years, with an increasing number of individuals seeking alternative treatments for mental health issues. The use of ketamine as a therapeutic agent has been gaining popularity in recent years, with some companies now offering at-home ketamine services. While the potential benefits of psychedelic therapy are promising, there are also valid concerns about its safety and regulation. Allowing patients to access psychedelic therapies from the comfort of their own homes raises questions about the adequacy of supervision and medical support. Additionally, the lack of federal regulation in this field raises concerns about the quality and consistency of care provided by companies that engage in this delivery model.

Ketamine is a powerful anesthetic and analgesic agent that was first approved by the FDA in 1970 as an anesthetic. In the years since its approval, ketamine has been used for various medical purposes, including as an analgesic, as a sedative for pediatric patients, and as a treatment for chronic pain. However, it was only in the 1990s that ketamine was first studied as a treatment for depression. In recent years, however, it has gained attention as a potential treatment for a range of mental health conditions, including depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) ^[1]. Ketamine works by blocking the N-methyl-D-aspartate (NMDA) receptors in the brain. This results in an increase in the release of the neurotransmitter glutamate, which has been linked to the formation of new synaptic connections in the brain. The increase in glutamate release is thought to be responsible for the antidepressant effects of ketamine.

Companies providing ketamine therapy to patients offer a range of options, including in-person and virtual treatments. The therapy consists of administering ketamine via an oral lozenge, with patients monitored by a medical professional throughout the session ^[2]. Treatment protocols typically involve six

sessions over the course of three weeks, with each session lasting approximately 45-60 minutes. Additionally, patients receive ongoing psychological support and counseling to help them manage their symptoms and integrate their experiences into their daily lives.

Despite the promising results of ketamine as a treatment for depression, there are concerns about the safety and efficacy of at-home ketamine therapies, including:

1. Abuse Potential
 - a. Ketamine is a controlled substance due to its potential for abuse, with some individuals using it recreationally for its dissociative effects ^[3]. While at-home ketamine businesses only administer ketamine under medical supervision, there is still a risk of patients developing an addiction or misusing the drug.
2. Cardiovascular Effects
 - a. Ketamine can have cardiovascular effects, including increases in blood pressure and heart rate ^[4]. While these effects are typically mild and transient, there is a potential risk for individuals with

pre-existing cardiovascular conditions, further compounded if treated outside a medical establishment.

3. Psychiatric Symptoms

- a. While ketamine has shown promise in treating depression and other mental health conditions, some individuals also risk it exacerbating psychiatric symptoms [5]. This is particularly true for individuals with a history of psychosis or bipolar disorder, as ketamine can trigger manic or psychotic episodes. It is imperative that extensive histories be taken in patients requesting to receive at-home ketamine therapy and contingency plans for how to manage patients who develop severe psychiatric symptoms appropriately are firmly established and effectively communicated to patients.

It is essential to acknowledge that at-home ketamine companies have taken steps to address these concerns, such as partnering with licensed medical professionals and adhering to state laws regarding using psychedelics in therapy. However, the rapid growth of this field and the lack of federal oversight highlights the need for continued research and, where necessary, regulation to ensure the safety and efficacy of these treatments.

As healthcare professionals, we are responsible for providing access to safe and effective treatments for our patients. While the potential benefits of psychedelic therapy are promising, we must approach this field with caution and prioritize the safety and well-being of our patients.

Lastly, the field of psychedelic therapy has the potential to revolutionize mental healthcare, but we must balance access and safety. Companies have an essential role in this movement, but we, as healthcare

professionals, must ensure that these treatments are delivered safely and responsibly.

AUTHOR INFORMATION

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