

ASC 2 Drug States

Date: Saturday 21 June 2014

Location: BPS Offices Tabernacle Street, London

Speakers, Titles and Abstracts:

Dr Ben Sessa: The History of Psychedelic Therapy

For millennia humans have used psychedelic drugs in the form of plants and fungi as tools for personal self-discovery, medicine and spirituality. Recently 're-discovered' by Western cultures in the post-war years following the discovery of LSD, the psychedelic drugs enjoyed a brief period of intense study and growing approval in psychiatry in the 1950s and 1960s. They then leaked from the clinical environment and became massively popularised. In the wake of the 1960s drug revolution the psychedelic drugs were demonised for socio-political reasons and left largely un-researched for a quarter of a century. In recent years scientists and doctors have revisited these drugs as potential tools for medicine and the study of human consciousness. A plethora of LSD, psilocybin, MDMA and ketamine drug-assisted psychotherapy studies are emerging across the globe as a new generation of psychedelic researchers cautiously embrace this renaissance of interest in psychedelic drugs.

Professor Michael Wang: Consciousness and Memory in the Operating Theatre

Episodes of full awareness with explicit recall during operations with general anaesthesia (GA) are more common than many realise (1 in 600 operations). Awareness with full recall is usually distressing and associated with acute PTSD reactions. The common reason for failure to identify intra-operative awareness is the paralyzing effects of muscle relaxants; contrary to traditional belief there are no reliable clinical signs to enable the identification of wakefulness. Studies conducted by Wang and Russell have made use of the isolated forearm technique to determine levels of consciousness during GA, which allows communication despite the muscle paralysis. Often patients will demonstrate high levels of intra-operative consciousness but without post-operative conscious recall. This is because many anaesthetic drugs impair the encoding phase of memory. It is likely that previous studies demonstrating intra-operative implicit (unconscious) learning have involved learning episodes during such states. Wang and colleagues have also investigated benzodiazepine sedation as another clinical circumstance in which there may be dissociation between implicit (unconscious) and explicit (conscious) recall. There is an intriguing literature in which

patients have developed psychological disturbance following operations with GA in which the patient has no conscious recall, but the nature of the disturbance is indicative of inadequate anaesthesia. Experimental studies that attempt to investigate the mechanisms by which this may occur are reviewed. Unexpectedly Wang required emergency open heart surgery at Christmas 2012. He has many memories of altered states of consciousness in the ICU and after, which he will describe and discuss.

Dr David Luke: Psychedelic consciousness: exceptional and transpersonal experiences

The traditional use of psychoactive plants as sacramentals in spiritual and shamanic rituals has continued for thousands of years, while the use of these substances in the developed world has also grown steadily in the last century as ever more plants are discovered and new synthetic chemicals are created. Since the earliest clinical, anthropological and recreational reports of the use of these powerful psychoactive substances they have been associated with all manner of exceptional experiences, ranging from the mystical to the psychical. The question arises as to whether these transpersonal and ostensibly paranormal experiences are genuine and what can be gained from studying them clinically, psychologically, neurologically and indeed ontologically.