

Hallucinogen May Cure Drug Addiction

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BAY AREA (KRON) -- Drug addiction has been the plague of modern America. But that could now change forever. What started as a rumor may now actually be an incredible breakthrough in the battle against addictions of all kinds.

Ibogaine has a number of strikes against it:

- It doesn't come from a modern laboratory, but from an ancient plant.
- It was discovered not by a scientist, but by a heroin addict.
- It is mildly hallucinogenic and completely illegal in the United States.

However, when it comes to curing addiction, a reputable scientist believes ibogaine is nothing short of a miracle. "I didn't believe it when I first heard about ibogaine. I thought it was something that needed to be debunked," admits Dr. Deborah Mash, professor of Neurology and Molecular and Cellular Pharmacology at University of Miami.

Dr. Mash is one of the few scientists in the world to study ibogaine, a mild hallucinogen that comes from the root of a shrub found in West Africa and was rumored to have the amazing ability to help drug addicts kick their addiction.

"This didn't come from the Salk Institute, this didn't come from the Scripps Institute. This came from a junkie who took a dose to get high himself. So the original observation came from the underground," says Dr. Mash.

Observations from this particular underground are not likely to gain the respect of mainstream society, and ibogaine was no exception.

That first report came in 1962. But decades would pass with little scientific investigation. There were decades during which the cost of addiction in terms of medical care, lost productivity, crime and incarceration rose to \$160 billion a year.

The human toll was impossible to calculate.

Patrick Kroupa was a heroin addict for 16 of his 35 years. "It was a very high level of desperation. I had been pretty successful in my life, I had accomplished a lot of things I wanted to do, and then repeatedly I just watched everything burst into flames and disintegrate because I could not stay off heroin," confesses Patrick. "It gets very tiring living like a slave because you keep chasing this and it's like you're not getting high, it's just 'I must do this every single day just to get normal so I can function.'"

Like most addicts, Patrick tried to quit. But treatment for addiction is notoriously ineffective. Only one in ten addicts manages to return to a drug-free life. Most stay dependent on illegal drugs or their legal substitutes, like methadone.

"And I was a spectacular failure at every possible treatment modality, every paradigm, every detox, every therapy, nothing ever worked," admits Patrick.

Even as Patrick Kroupa despaired of ever kicking heroin, Dr. Mash was petitioning the Federal Food and Drug Administration to allow a scientific test of ibogaine, which by this time had been classified as a "schedule one" drug on a par with heroin. In 1993, the FDA approval came through.

"We were established, we had a team of research scientists, doctors, clinicians, psychiatrists, toxicologists and we wanted to go forward with this," describes Dr. Mash.

But even with FDA approval, Dr. Mash could not get funding to look into what was, after all, a counter-culture drug. In order to complete her project, she had to leave South Florida and go offshore, to the island of St. Kitts.

In 1998, clinical trials finally got underway. Patients were given carefully prepared oral doses of ibogaine. What happened next astounded the sceptical scientist.

"Our first round in St. Kitts, we treated six individuals, and I will go to my grave with the memory of that first round," says Dr. Mash.

It quickly became apparent that one dose of ibogaine blocked the withdrawal symptoms of even hard-core addicts and was amazingly effective for heroin, crack cocaine and even alcohol.

There are two reasons why: The first, science can measure. The second remains a mystery.

Dr. Mash admits, "I was really scared. I questioned my own sanity on numerous occasions."

"I don't like the word 'hallucinogen,' but indeed, ibogaine alters mental state. And what it seems to do is it puts people into a four to six hour state of almost an active dream, it's like a lucid dream." she describes.

But as Dr. Mash was about to discover, during that dream state, something extraordinary happens. "We knew ibogaine was effective for blocking opiate withdrawal, we saw it diminish the desire to use alcohol. And we saw the cravings for cocaine blocked. I was hooked," she says.

Patrick admits, "It's literally like a miracle. Nothing has ever worked and this just did." He was one of the 280 people in Dr. Mash's trial of ibogaine.

"Patrick was one of the worst opiate addicts, worst heroin addicts that I have ever encountered in my life," says Dr. Mash. His arms still bear the scars of years of heroin addiction, and he knows only too well what happened when the flow of drugs into those arms was interrupted. "When you're going through withdrawal, you're sweating, you're shaking, you're freezing, you're hot, it feels like your spine is being smashed in a vise, it's pain," describes Patrick.

Within 45 minutes of taking ibogaine, he actually felt his addiction leaving him. "That moment is the first time in about 10 years that I had actually been clean. Not just detoxed, but clean. That was it. That was the first time. That was like a miracle," says Patrick

That was four years ago. Patrick Kroupa has not touched drugs since. "I'm saying this having been on heroin for my entire adult life. I mean, 14 to 30 is a long time," he says.

On one level, Dr. Mash understands some of what happens. Ibogaine in the body is metabolized into another compound called 'noribogaine.' Noribogaine appears to reset chemical switches in the brain of an addict.

"The noribogaine resets that, so it resets the opiates, blocks the opiate withdrawal, diminishes craving and the desire to use, and it elevates mood," say Dr. Mash.

But of the "visions" that people see, Dr. Mash understands very little -- only that they are somehow significant to the outcome. "It's as if the plant is teaching you something fundamental about who you are as a person and why you've got yourself locked into this intractable pattern of behavior," she says.

Ibogaine will not work for everyone. And even for those for whom it does work, it is not a "magic bullet." "You need treatment, you need social workers, you need case management, you need medication, psychiatry, you need the whole boat of professionalism around this," says Dr. Mash.

But for Patrick Kroupa and many of the other addicts in the trials, ibogaine was a miracle. "It's like if you suffer from terminal cancer and somebody goes by and says, 'Oh, yeah, we cured that. We passed this thing over you and it's gone,'" he says.

Even the reserved scientist believes this ancient drug from Africa holds astounding promise for

the modern world. "I think we're going to see fantastic numbers. I think these numbers are going to be stunning," says Dr. Mash.

Dr. Mash will present her findings to the Food and Drug Administration next month. She hopes the FDA will eventually authorize further testing, based on her results. In the meantime, ibogaine remains illegal in the United States.

Ibogaine is advertised on the internet, but there is no guarantee of the quality unless it's given under medical supervision. And for now, that can only be done overseas.

For ibogaine detox information, contact Healing Transitions at 1-888-426-4286 or www.Ibogaine.net

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