

INFORMATION FOR THERAPISTS ON KETAMINE AND HOW TO SUPPORT PATIENTS

SOME BACKGROUND ON PSYCHOTHERAPUTIC SUPPORT FOR PSYCHOACTIVE MEDICATIONS

Psychoactive drugs have been proposed to work synergistically with psychological therapies, and support for preparation and integration are recognized as essential components of psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy. However, distinct psychotherapeutic support has not typically been emphasized in current psychiatric use of ketamine. The FDA-approved model of esketamine for treatment-resistant depression does not explicitly demand therapist engagement in preparation or integration of experiences. The relative lack of emphasis on adjunctive psychotherapy contrasts with the early work in ketamine-assisted psychotherapy by Salvador Roquet and his colleagues in Mexico in the 1970s which was embedded in a psychodynamically informed group therapy. Subsequent work in addiction also administered ketamine in the context of psychodynamic group therapy, and follow-up assessments of these groups suggested this intensive therapy program was key to the effectiveness of ketamine in the treatment of alcohol use disorder. More recently, adjunct cognitive-behavioral therapy following ketamine infusions was found to prolong the therapeutic effects of ketamine for depression. The increasingly prominent KAP model also strongly emphasizes the role of both therapeutic support and set and setting in accentuating and extending the longevity of ketamine effects.

Wyoming Wellness Center is always a firm believer in psychotherapeutic support for patients, and especially when a client is receiving ketamine therapy. We will not provide ketamine therapy to mental health clients who are not actively participating in counseling/therapy of some kind. We strongly encourage our patients receiving ketamine for chronic pain to also be involved in counseling/therapy.

KETAMINE AND KAP THERAPY

Ketamine-assisted psychotherapy (KAP) utilizes ketamine to help patients struggling to find relief from mental health symptoms. Research has explored the potential of psychedelics in psychotherapy for several decades. Ketamine's dissociative and pain-managing processes help individuals safely explore painful emotions and memories.

Talk therapy has been an excellent—sometimes life-saving—process for many struggling with mental health. But for others, no matter how long they spend on the therapist's couch, they struggle to find relief for their symptoms. In those cases, nontraditional therapy tools might be more effective, tools like ketamine.

Ketamine has several properties that make it useful in the medical field. Ketamine is a drug that is best known for both its pain relief and its psychedelic properties. Ketamine can decrease sensitivity to pain, and depending on dosage, route of administration, etc., it can create hypnotic, dream-like, or even fully dissociative trance states for a person.

Thanks to these effects, ketamine has had many uses in the medical field over multiple decades. It is often used as a part of general anesthesia to control pain during and after surgery. Ketamine has also developed something of a negative reputation as of late due to increased instances of misuse and addiction on the street. However, ketamine is beginning to gain traction in quite a different context: psychotherapy.

Ketamine-assisted psychotherapy (KAP) is a mental health treatment method that involves using ketamine's trance-inducing and pain-relieving properties to help individuals work through various mental and emotional challenges.

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For a few decades, researchers have investigated the uses of psychedelic substances like psilocybin (commonly associated with magic mushrooms) and MDMA (commonly associated with ecstasy) as an alternative and/or supplement to traditional talk therapy. All this research has proved promising, but ketamine has pulled a bit ahead of the pack in many ways.

The first reports of using ketamine in psychiatric treatment came in 1973. Since then, research and personal anecdotes have painted a successful picture of ketamine in treating anything from depression to addiction to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In 2019, ketamine (specifically esketamine) became the first psychedelic drug to be approved by the FDA for use in treatment-resistant depression.

Today, KAP is most often used in treating major depressive disorder (MDD) and PTSD but has made appearances working with issues like substance use disorders and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), among others. Treating mental illness is not often as simple as weekly talk therapy or daily medication. Sometimes, it can be difficult, maybe even seemingly impossible, for a person to manage their symptoms.

Unpleasant thoughts, painful memories, stubborn beliefs about us and the world; these are not always easy things to sit with, let alone long enough to deal with. Because our brains are wired to try to protect us, the root of these issues can often be shoved down out of our reach, leaving us to deal with the aftermath. So, someone living with MDD might be battling a constant wave of hopeless thoughts and negative beliefs about their self-worth, while someone with PTSD is trying to manage debilitating fear and uncontrollable flashbacks. This is where KAP comes in.

During a typical KAP session—prefaced by thorough evaluation and discussions with the provider—a patient will usually lie down in a quiet room and take the prescribed dose of ketamine. Providers might put on soft music or have patients wear an eye mask to keep the environment as relaxed as possible. The medication can be administered via Intravenous, Intramuscular, Intranasal, or sublingual routes. In a therapist's office it will be in the form of a lozenge that dissolves under the tongue and takes about 10 minutes to kick in. Shortly after, patients will start to feel the dissociative effects. For the next 45 minutes or so, with the therapist or provider monitoring, patients explore and experience whatever arises from their mind. According to both providers and patients, these trance-like states that ketamine can produce relax the walls that often come up when trying to address painful emotions. With these walls down, patients can access these things in a controlled environment without fighting against the mind's natural defenses.

After the experience, the patient and provider/therapist might sit together and discuss what came up. Sometimes patients do not want to discuss their experience right after their treatment. That is why it is important for patients to see their therapists within the next 12 to 48 hours after a treatment. At this point the mind is still open and the emotional and mental effects of ketamine are still there and allow work/therapy to be done in an easier and more relaxed fashion. Patients can continue to work through their challenges in the days and weeks following, ketamine included or not.

Integration should occur very shortly after the ketamine treatment. Neuroplasticity will peak between 12-48 hours after the ketamine treatment so integration at this point will help their brain adapt and grow in a positive way. It will direct their focus as new synapses are formed, based on the experience. SEVERAL Integration sessions should happen between ketamine medication sessions. Also, more than "talk therapy" should be utilized when ketamine treatments

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are taking place. EMDR, CBT, IFS, DBT, ART, Brain Spotting, Solution Focused Brief Therapy, etc. are all good forms of therapy to be utilized along with ketamine assisted psychotherapy or KAP.

Notably, patients tend to report few side effects from KAP, aside from those typically expected from psychedelic substances—dizziness, nausea, vomiting, and increased heart rate being the most common. As with any practice that involves bringing up painful feelings and experiences, things can feel a lot worse before they start to feel better. Anyone looking into KAP should keep this in mind and discuss a potential plan with their therapist for safety.

Many have found that the experience of KAP led to therapeutic breakthroughs at an exponentially faster rate than traditional talk therapy. They've uncovered repressed memories, faced previously unbearable emotions, and even found the purpose they have been searching for.

Research is, of course, still ongoing for KAP and other psychedelic psychotherapies. While this doesn't mean KAP will be a guaranteed fix, it opens a much-needed door for people struggling to progress with more traditional forms of therapy.

THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN WORKING WITH CLIENTS TAKING KETAMINE THERAPY

KEEP AND OPEN MIND

Don't let your disbelief or skepticism discourage them. Your words are powerful. Ketamine treatments create incremental shifts and changes, and often the road to recovery and healing takes a long time. They can feel discouraged sometimes after the first treatment. This is normal! Be levelheaded and positive. Be their cheerleader or shoulder to lean on. Keep in mind, unsupportive words and actions can make an already bumpy road even more difficult to navigate.

PROVIDE AND HOLD SPACE

A lot can come up during ketamine treatments. They can remember repressed traumatic events. They may have feelings or emotions they have suppressed for years, amongst many other things. They may tell you some really out there, things like they died or saw deceased relatives. Hold space for them to share these thoughts by listening actively and *without judgement*. Be aware of what comes up for you when they share these things with you and perhaps save sharing your thoughts for another time. Allowing them to share their experience and the thoughts and feelings they have after the treatments is part of the healing processes.

WHAT IS IT LIKE TO GET A KETAMINE TREATMENT?

Depending on the dose and route of administration of ketamine, one may experience anything from being more aware of how their body feels, quieting of the mind, and/or feelings of love and gratitude, all the way to feeling connecting to the Universe/God, death of their ego, and reliving past experiences from a different perspective (third person or from the outside looking in).

HOW WILL THEY FEEL AFTER A KETAMINE TREATMENT?

Many patients take 20-30 minutes or more to recover after a treatment. They may feel a little tired, notice a mild difficulty in walking, or even "cloudy thinking" for a few hours to a day afterwards. We recommend taking it easy and having a relaxing day following the infusion.

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WHAT SHOULD I WATCH OUT FOR?

Physically, they may experience some mild nausea (usually the clinic has some strategy to address this for the patient prior to leaving). Mostly, you may notice they seem tired, more relaxed, and/or perhaps a bit dreamy. They may be more introspective thinking about their experience, or for some may be very excited by their experience and have a desire to tell you all about it. This is where steps 1 and 2 can help you out! If you are worried about serious medical emergencies or side effects of ketamine you need to keep an eye out for, most of the serious ones occur during the treatment in the safety of the clinic. However, if you notice them acting very much out of their normal self or physically debilitated, go to your closest emergency room.

MY SPECIFIC INSIGHTS TO KETAMINE TREATMENT

In my opinion, the best way to support a client during their ketamine treatments is to be open minded about what they tell you they experienced in their journeys. Patients can experience anything and nothing during their journeys. I've had patients say they've talked with God, tasted the color purple, saw someone from their past, experienced their own death, there are so many things that can happen during a ketamine journey. What is important is to keep an open mind. Trying to help the patient determine possible reasons, why their mind showed them what it did, then moving forward, trying to integrate that knowledge into their life and utilize it to improve their mental and physical health.

Below are two things to help explain this a bit better. One is specifically based towards talking with therapists who are working with ketamine patients, and the other one is what I give to my ketamine patients about integration and therapy and its importance.

It's hard to tell you what to expect as every patient is so different and their journeys are very different from one another, and each journey is usually different as well. There may be aspects of each journey that are slightly the same but most of the time each journey is a brand-new experience.

I talk with patients in detail before ketamine treatment about ego disillusion or death to self and what that means. During psychedelic journeys sometimes patients may feel like they are dying, however what is usually happening is their own ego is what is dying and the way they view themselves (and others) in life, is what is dying. And if they can trust that and experience it and move through it, most of the time they come out the other side of that experience as feeling a sense of forgiveness, understanding, patience, sometimes being able to cut themselves some slack in how they judge themselves (and others) and interpret things regarding themselves and other people in their life. Sometimes they're able to change their outlook on life and on how they look at themselves and how life affects them. So, it can be a very scary time in a ketamine journey but most of the time it is a very cathartic and positive outcome in the end and allows patients to move forward in their therapy.

We also talk about K-Holing which is very different from ego disillusion. K-holing is when a person is stuck in a ketamine or any psychedelic journey and it's a negative, very negative experience, in that journey and they can't get out of it, they are stuck in it. How that typically happens is when people are using ketamine or other psychedelics without anybody there to help them and be a sitter for them, Not listening to music, as music helps to move them through their journey's. And usually, it is always due to taking way too much ketamine. There are very few times that a patient would K-Hole during a ketamine treatment, as they should have a sitter there to

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help them through, whom they can reach out to, and that should be paying very close attention to them to see if maybe they need to say a word of encouragement or hold a hand if asked to. They should be listening to wordless music that helps move them through their journey. Not having music to listen to can let you be locked into a certain part of a journey or situation that you then can't get out of. The eye shades are important because they help patients to focus on themselves and the journey unfolding in front of their eyes and in their mind, and not get sidetracked onto what they're seeing in the room, which can affect their journey and prevent their journey from going where it needs to go. All these things are done, music picked by somebody other than the patient, noise cancelling headphones, and eye shades, to help free the mind and yet allow the mind to show the patient what it needs to show them when it wants to show them.

Patients are very impressionable and vulnerable in the days after a ketamine treatment so it is very important to be positive with them and be open to what insights they may have or the experiences that they were shown during their journey and try to thoughtfully talk about and determine possibly why their mind showed them the things it did during their journey, and then to further try to integrate that into their therapy and improving their mental and physical health.

If they share with you that they do not want to do ketamine therapy anymore or share with you negative part of their journey that they are fearful of, or if they have any physical reactions to the ketamine, PLEASE let me know immediately so we can determine what the next steps should be.

KAP TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

[Psychedelic Research and Training Institute](#)

<https://pratigroup.org> › [kap-training](#)

Our KAP Training program incorporates practical skills, clinical research, and supported ketamine experiences to inform and empower you in this emerging field.

[Ketamine Training Center](#)

<https://theketaminetrainingcenter.com>

Ketamine assisted psychotherapy (KAP) training for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) providers is an essential step towards addressing disparities ...

[American Society of Ketamine Physicians, Psychotherapists, and Practitioners](#)

<https://www.askp.org> › [educational-resources-for-psyc...](#)

The Ketamine Training Center. Training to Medical Professionals, Therapists, Clergy and Hospice Providers who desire to use Ketamine Assisted Psychotherapy (KAP) ...

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[Polaris Insight Center](#)

<https://www.polarisinsight.com › practice-module>

Clinicians will learn how to implement principles of KAP in practice, respond to common questions and challenges that can arise during KAP, gain experience ...

[fluencetraining.com](#)

<https://www.fluencetraining.com › certificate-programs>

The Fluence certificate KAP is an advanced program designed to prepare licensed clinicians to deliver ketamine-assisted psychotherapy.

****If you have further questions or want to collaborate more about your client and their therapy at WWC, please do not hesitate to reach out to me, Tracy Richard, my email is**

Tracy.Richard@wyomingwc.com.

****If you message me about your client, please use *Initials only*. Then after I receive your email I will encrypt our conversation and reply back to you HIPAA compliantly using the Hushmail system that is tied to our emails.****

We look forward to working with you for the betterment of our mutual client!!

Tracy Richard CRNA, APRN