

Open camera or QR reader and
scan code to access this article
and other resources online.



Psilocybin: Medicine for My Soul. Relief from Emotional and Spiritual Pain as a Hospice Nurse Diagnosed with Cancer

Mary P. Clark, RN BSN

I have been a nurse for 50 years, 30 of those have been at the bedside of the dying, trying to relieve end-of-life suffering. Despite the fact that I have been with thousands of patients at the end of their lives and witnessed hundreds take their last breath and feel spiritually grounded, it wasn't until *My Own Cancer* diagnosis that I truly understood the existential fear of my own nonexistence—my own death.

Having cancer changed my life in an instant. I quickly realized conventional medicine's focus was truly only on curing my body with no attention to the distress of my mind or fear of my spirit. One statement that truly resonated with me was when a physician wrote that "once a patient's cancer has initially been treated it is up to the patient to learn how to live with the fear." I can say that finding one's way through fear is a lonely struggle. It was the persistent fear, three years after my first diagnosis, that prompted me to seek psychedelic treatment on my own.

It is not hard to find psilocybin. Here in Oregon, it has been decimalized. I found a website on psilocybin that provided me with all the information I needed on proper dosing. I started with microdoses of 0.2–1 gram and then tried a 5-gram dose in hopes of having a mystical experience. Having no expert guidance with this dose, it was not the wisest decision.

I determined the setting would be my own home with my husband of 50 years as my guide. Within 60 minutes of ingesting the mushrooms, I became agitated and restless. Remembering our youthful experiences with LSD, my husband suggested it was just a bad trip and would soon get better. "I said, 'this is not bad; this is the most intense experience of my life.'" I could not listen to music, I needed to sit up, then I needed to lie down. I could not relax into the experience, until suddenly I split into white light and began to weep. All I could say over and over was there has been so much death, *so much death*. I felt as if every bit of suffering and sorrow I had witnessed in my nursing career was pouring out of every cell in my body. I cried for all the suffering I had seen and could not

relieve. I cried for the years I had to be the pillar of strength in the middle of it all. I did not think it was humanly possible to cry as long and as hard as I did. It was the most intense cleansing experience of my life.

Afterwards, I found a brilliant spiritually oriented psychiatrist to assist me with integrating the experience. The one question asked during my integration was "What was the feeling under the tears." My response—*grief*. I experienced, not the remembrance of patient stories, but the deep unexpressed feelings I experienced while being a part of those stories. It wasn't an experience of words. It was an experience of feelings, my grief, the patient's grief, the family's grief, grief that I didn't even realize penetrated my bones.

I did not get the mystical experience I wanted; though it was a difficult experience I feel I got what I needed. I feel, prior to my own death, I have been relieved of my own sorrow and my patients' suffering, and I now peacefully view my nursing career as one of beauty filled with both sorrow and grace.

For my second experience, I had a reduced dose of 2.5 grams taken while on the beach of a riverbank. I entered this journey with my eyes wide open and a playlist of music. The journey started in the late afternoon under a blue sky filled with white clouds. As the mushrooms took effect, it felt as if the sky and clouds came down, and I became a part of them. Though I had a playlist of music I only listened to one song *Aum Sakti* on repeat. It was a song with a bottom drum layer that kept me grounded and a melody that brought me higher and higher into undulating energetic waves while the setting sun turned the clouds pink and purple.

It was during this experience I got what I wanted, a mystical experience of unity and love. It is impossible to put into words this feeling of utter peace, deep understanding, and connection to everything in the universe. I knew to the depth of my core I would be ok when I die. To this day, whenever I play that one song, I remember the experience vividly.

Though these two experiences were vastly different, both were needed, both provided relief from extreme anxiety,

trauma, fear of dying, and healing on a deep spiritual level. I gained firsthand knowledge of what psychedelic therapy can do, including the importance of knowing dose, set and setting, having a guide and a therapist in place for integration. And my experiences dispelled the notion that one journey would be all that is needed.

In the spring of 2023, I was diagnosed with a second cancer. This time invasive lobular cancer. It is hard to describe the feeling of fear associated with the word CANCER. The question of whether I am going to die appeared first and foremost once again.

Again, my life became treatment plans, doctors, and decisions. Though my treatment, this second time was different because my young surgeon was knowledgeable about psychedelics. She felt a psilocybin experience either before surgery or after would be of benefit. I chose two weeks after surgery when experiencing significant axillary nerve pain from the lymph node biopsy. I took 1.5 grams of psilocybin while outside on my deck on a beautiful spring day with a playlist of music. I experienced six hours of pain free bliss. It was as if I stepped into a conduit of healing light. I thought, I know this place, it is where I go as a nurse when I get it right. It is the place I go when what I do and say comes through me not from me. I connected to a source of healing light and felt radiant. The song I listened to most during this experience was *Alleluia* by the Men's Mormon Tabernacle Choir. A week after this experience someone said, "For just having surgery you look radiant." That feeling of radiance stayed with me through an infection and rehospitalization. I listen to *Alleluia* whenever afraid or in doubt to remember the light.

I had my first psilocybin experience three years after the initial diagnosis and wished it had been much earlier for it would have saved me days, weeks, months, even years, of anxiety and fear. Shedding layers of traumas and feeling, I tapped into a much greater source of healing that would have enlivened and empowered me much sooner. Those experiences made the diagnosis of a second cancer much easier because I knew I already had tools to help with the fear.

I am deeply thankful for all the research and curative treatments of western medicine that has now made me cancer free, but without the medicines for my mind and spirit: music,

mediation, prayer, nature, and psychedelics and integration I would not feel healed, whole, and unafraid.

In my career, I have witnessed an enormous number of human suffering and many advancements in methods of pain control for the body, but little to ease emotional and spiritual suffering. What I experienced was medicine for my soul.

The only way I could continue at the bedside for 50 years was to vow no one's suffering would be in vain, what each person's suffering taught me would go on to help another. I now speak out on my experiences so other's suffering may be relieved with this new research, as mine has been. I hope people will have access to psychedelics without legal risk, with the assistance of experienced and compassionate guides, so they don't have to find their way alone.

We will all face Death. Death is the ultimate leap into unknown Mystery. We must all learn how to turn toward Death. Many of us will turn toward spiritual teaching and wisdom traditions. In addition, for some of us, psychedelics may provide us with the knowing and courage to take that leap without fear. I know they will provide it for me when my time comes.

Acknowledgments

To all the patients and families, the author have served, and Anthony Back MD, Rod Birney MD, Norma Hirsch MD.

Author Disclosure Statement

No competing financial interests exist.

Funding Information

No funding was received for this article.

Address correspondence to:
 Mary P. Clark, RN BSN
 Asante Health System – Hospice
 2825 E Barnett Rd
 Medford OR 97504
 USA

E-mail: mphclark@jeffnet.org