



**Alberta Health  
Services**

**This material is intended for general information only and is provided on an “as is”, “where is” basis. Although reasonable efforts were made to confirm the accuracy of the information, Alberta Health Services does not make any representation or warranty, express, implied or statutory, as to the accuracy, reliability, completeness, applicability or fitness for a particular purpose of such information.**

**This material is not a substitute for the advice of a qualified health professional. Alberta Health Services expressly disclaims all liability for the use of these materials, and for any claims, actions, demands or suits arising from such use.**



**Alberta Health  
Services**

**Knowledge Bites Lunch 'n' Learn**

**October 4, 2023**

# Educational Needs and Perceptions about Psychedelic-Assisted Psychotherapy Among Mental Health Professionals Within AHS: A Brief Introduction to Psychedelics in Practice

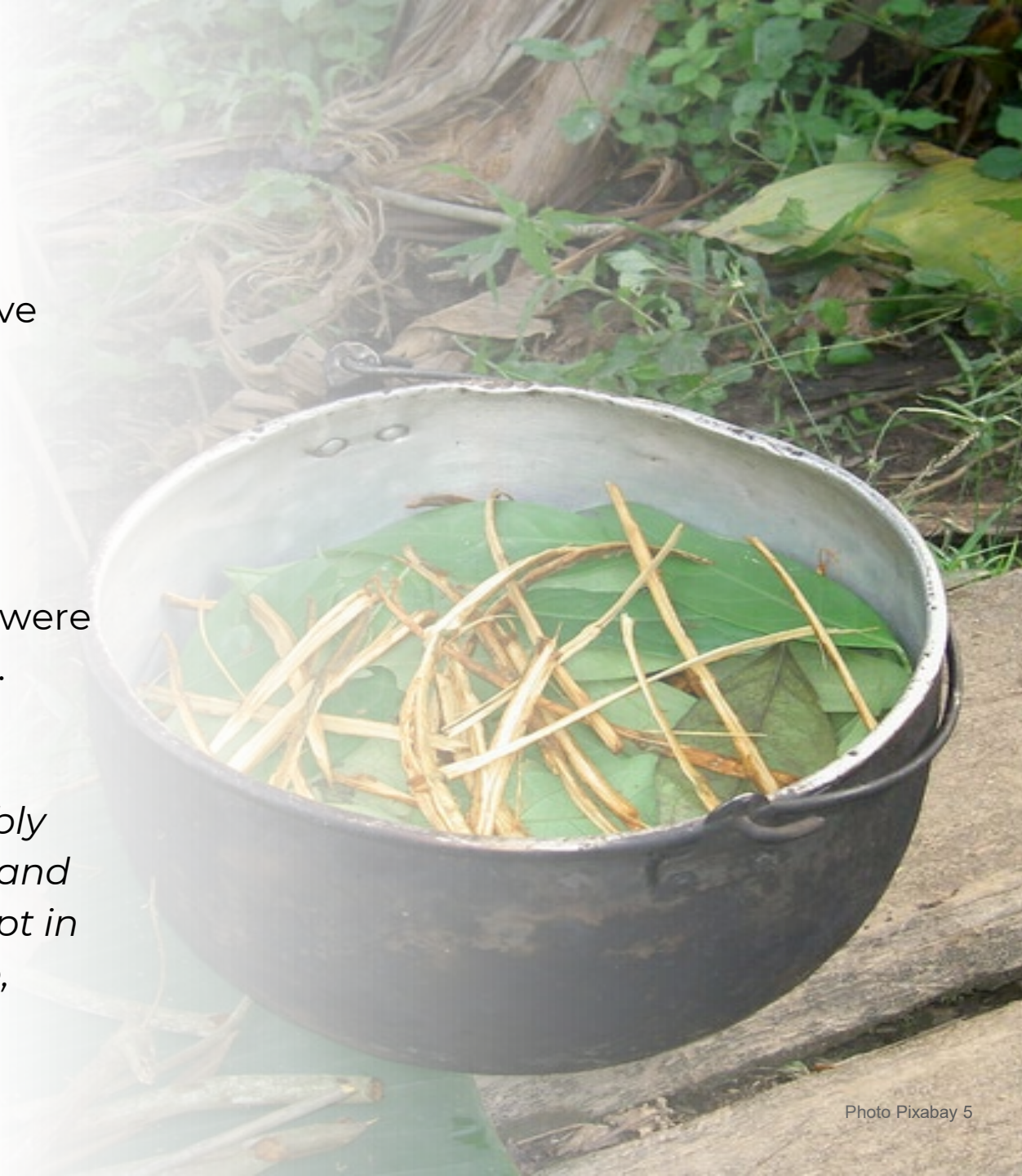


Dr. Kevin St. Arnaud  
Ph.D., R. Psych



# What Are Psychedelics?

- Psychedelics are amongst the oldest psychoactive substances with known use by humans.
- Greek *psyche* (soul) and *delos* (show). Usually interpreted as *mind manifesting*.
- Historically, psychedelic states of consciousness were sought for spiritual, social, and healing purposes.
- *“The feature that distinguishes the psychedelics from other classes of drug is their capacity reliably to induce states of altered perception, thought, and feeling that are not experienced otherwise except in dreams or at times of religious exaltation” (Jaffe, 1990).*





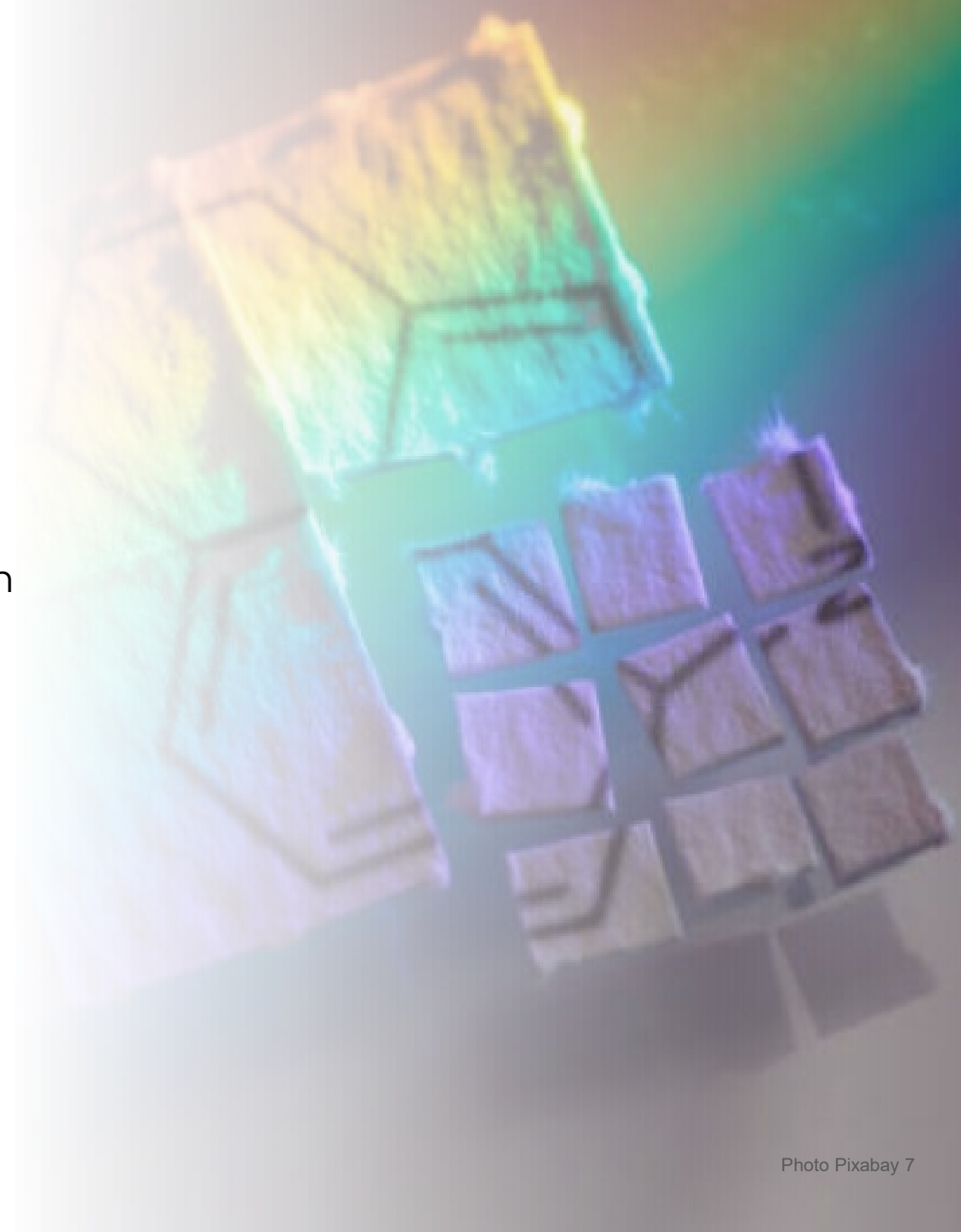
# Study Overview

- Psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy (PAT) is an emerging treatment showing considerable promise - how might it be integrated into AHS?
- Michelle St. Pierre, along with Dr. Lisa Burback, Dr. Olga, Dr. Graham Gaine, and myself developed a survey assessing PAT education needs and perceptions among AHS mental health professionals.
- Disseminated survey to provincial AHS listservs for OT, SW, and PSYCH.
- AHS Allied Health Professionals (N = 351)
- Age range 25-74, M = 45.



# Results Summary

- > 75% believe that psychedelics show promise in treating mental health conditions.
- > half (59%) of clinicians reported that PAT had already come up in their practice at least once; 18% reported patient inquires about PAT more than five times within the past five years.
- > half (55%) of clinicians reported low to no competence when having these discussions.
- > 66% believe Albertans should have access to PAT.
- The vast majority (91%) want to learn more about PAT, and many called on AHS to provide educational opportunities.



# Educational Topics

1. Types of Psychedelics
1. Potential Benefits of PAT
1. Set and Setting
1. How to Conduct PAT
1. Risks/Contraindications/Medication Interactions
1. Laws and Regulations





# Types of Psychedelics

- The “classic” psychedelics typically include two major classes: tryptamines and phenethylamines—
  - Psilocybin
  - Lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD)
  - Ayahuasca - dimethyltryptamine(DMT)
  - Mescaline
  - Methylenedioxy-methamphetamine (MDMA)
- Potent serotonin (5-HT) agonists, particularly at the 5-HT<sub>2A</sub> receptor.
- Ketamine is also now being used as a “psychedelic,” though it is a dissociative anesthetic and NMDA antagonist.



# Set and Setting

- The nature of a psychedelic experience greatly depends on the *set* and *setting* of the user.
- “To fathom Hell or go angelic / Just take a pinch of PSYCHEDELIC”
- Set includes: the intention, personality, intelligence, and emotional state.
- Setting includes: the physical, the social, and the cultural.
- Set and setting are primary, rather than secondary, contributors to the experience and outcome.



Photo Pixabay

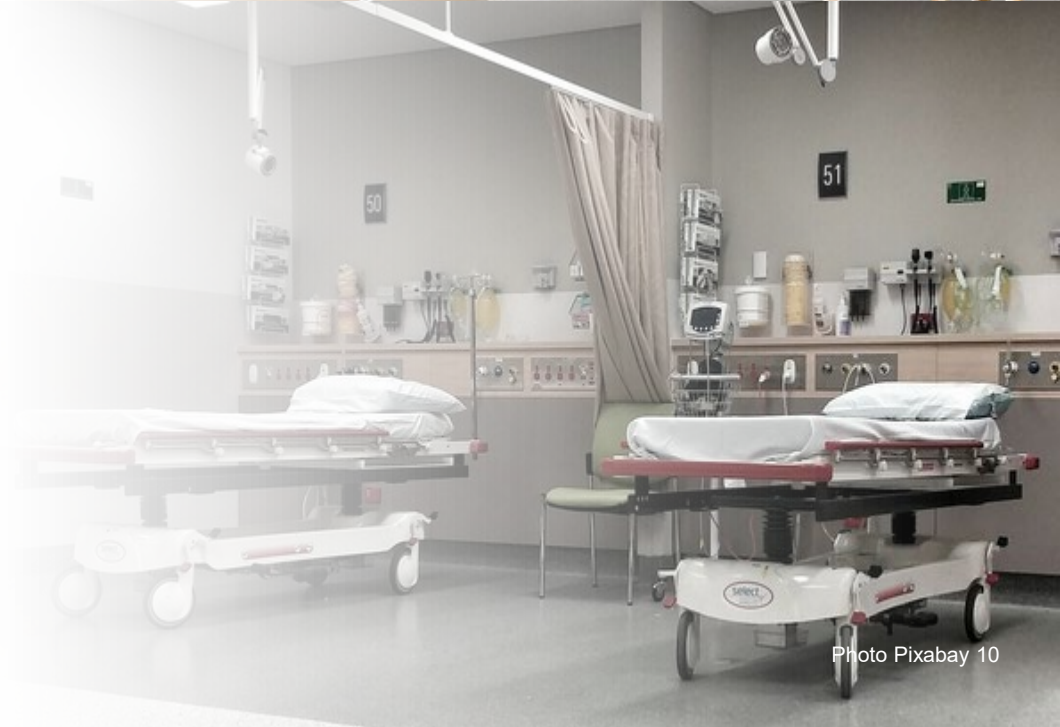
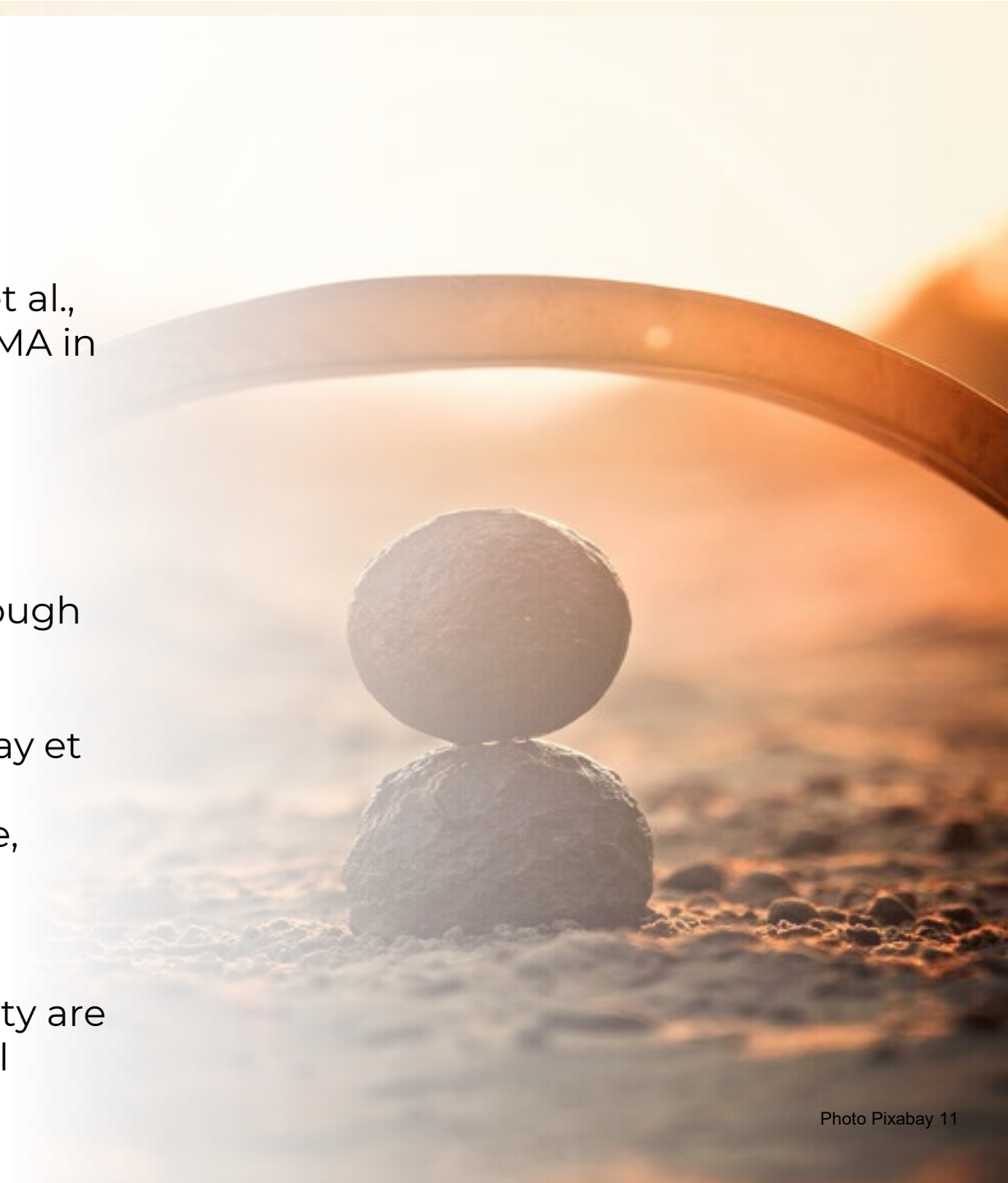


Photo Pixabay 10



# Potential Benefits

- Recent systematic reviews (Ko et al., 2022; Reiff et al., 2020) of clinical trials support the efficacy of MDMA in the treatment of PTSD, and psilocybin in the treatment of depression and cancer-related anxiety/distress.
- Research supporting LSD and ayahuasca in the treatment of mental disorders is preliminary, though promising.
- A systematic review of experimental studies (Aday et al., 2020) found enduring beneficial changes in depression, anxiety, wellbeing, substance misuse, mindfulness, and spirituality.
- Mystical experiences, connectedness, emotional breakthrough, insight, and psychological flexibility are predictive of long-term changes in psychological functioning.



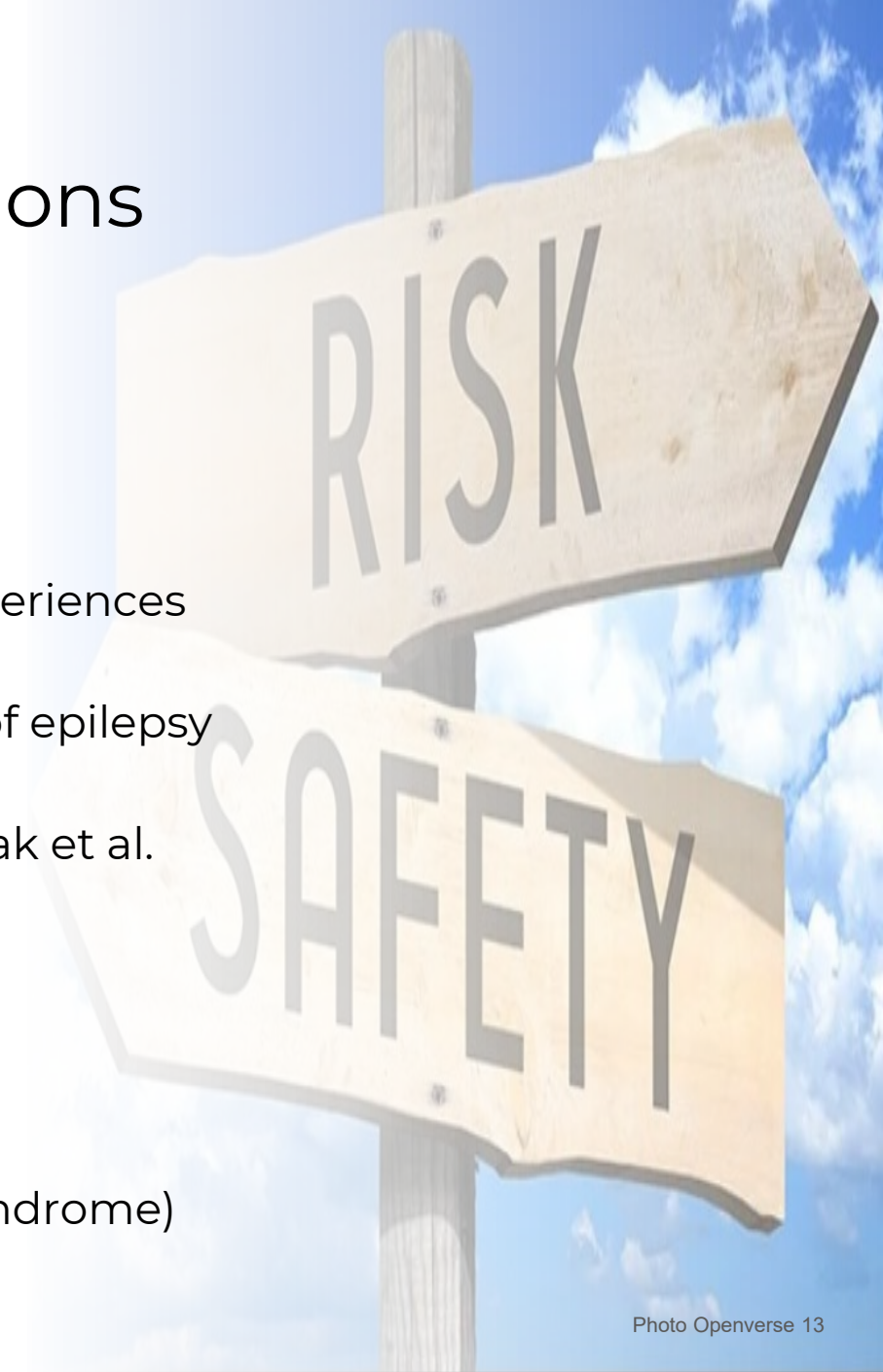
# Conducting Psychedelic-Assisted Psychotherapy

- Used to catalyze psychotherapy, not as a pharmacotherapy.
- Psycholytic vs psychedelic psychotherapy.
- Pre-Drug Sessions: Patient meets with therapists over the course of a few sessions to establish relationship before the drug session(s).
- Drug Sessions: ingest drug, prone, eye shades, instrumental *music*, and focus on inner experience. Supportive/non-directive; encourage trust, openness, and surrender to whatever arises.
- Post-Drug Sessions: *integration* is essential. Discuss concerns and contextualize drug session insights.



# Potential Risks: Safety & Contraindications

- *Classic* psychedelics are very safe substances.
  - Not physiologically or cognitively toxic
  - Not addictive (e.g., may *treat* addictions)
  - May elicit extremely strong anxiety, and psychotic-like experiences
  - May increase heart rate and blood pressure
  - May elicit seizures in those with a personal/family history of epilepsy
- Potentially contraindicated in those (Johnson et al., 2008; Nayak et al. 2021; Simonsson et a., 2022; Vollenweider et al. 1998):
  - With a history of psychotic disorder (BPD?, Bipolar?)
  - With serious and untreated cardiovascular disease
  - With serious and untreated seizure disorder
  - Using serotonergic antidepressants (blunting, serotonin syndrome)
  - Using haloperidol (derealization, hyper arousal/anxiety)
  - Using lithium (seizures)



# Regulations and Laws

- The Albertan Legislation regulating psychedelics is the first of its kind in Canada; came into effect on January 16th, 2023.
- Clinics offering psychedelic-assisted treatment must be licensed and have the medical oversight of a psychiatrist.
- A provider who offers or psychedelic drug treatment services requires a License.
- Only a psychiatrist, or an appropriately trained physician in consultation with a psychiatrist, can prescribe psychedelic drugs used in treatment.
- Patients undergoing psychedelic treatment must be monitored by regulated therapists with specialized training in PAT.





# Questions

- Questions
- Feel free to contact me: [kos@ualberta.ca](mailto:kos@ualberta.ca)

