

THE BECKLEY FOUNDATION

WOMEN'S VISIONARY CONGRESS

SAN FRANCISCO 2007

BY AMANDA FEILDING

Hello Annie and everyone at the conference. I very much wish I was with you now, but thank you for allowing me to say a few words about the Beckley Foundation, which is a charitable trust I set up a number of years ago with two main aims: one to investigate consciousness and its altered states, and the other is to address the problem of global drug policy. Everyone agrees that it's not working, it's not achieving its day to day aims, and it's causing massive unhappiness on the way. Worldwide over 19 million people are in prison for drug related offences, over 500,000 of whom are in the USA, where ironically, the cost of keeping a person in prison is more than the room, board and tuition at Harvard. For all the hundreds of billions of dollars spent annually on enforcement, the world is awash with psychoactive substances, they have never been cheaper, purer, or more available.

The Beckley Foundation has three main programmes, one is the science programme, the second is the seminar programme, and third is the drug policy programme. The aim of the Beckley Foundation is to do cutting edge neuroscience about consciousness and its changing states whether brought about by meditation, chanting, deep breathing, psychoactive substances, how they correlate and change by using the very latest technology – EEG, MEG, MRI, and different ways of identifying what is happening under the subjective experience. We work with top scientists in the field. I am very lucky to have a very distinguished board of scientific advisors, Albert Hofmann, Sasha Shulgin, Colin Blakemore who is Chief Executive of the Medical Research Council in England, Dave Nichols, and Professor Ramachandran. I very much like working with very established institutions in order to give the subject the full credibility that it needs.

The good news this year is that we've got the full permission to do research with LSD in human subjects. The first LSD study which we've got going will investigate the dose relation, there will be two doses and a placebo and the neuro correlates that change with the different experiences. The second phase will be moving into MEG and MRI to observe changes in blood supply, neurotransmitters, and getting a better, deeper understanding of how it alters consciousness, mood, creativity, and the things about humanity that we value. This is actually the first study since prohibition stopped all research into the use of psychedelics more than 30 years ago. It is the first study to get permission to study the effects of LSD in human subjects and I'm very much hoping it will open the doors to an orchard rich in ripe fruit for the plucking, and it already seems to be happening because I've got several other institutions interested in working out protocols to do with the research into LSD. I did one looking at creativity and its changing states, and another into psychopharmacology, and another in Europe looking at the changes in cerebral circulation which has always been a topic I've found extremely interesting. The hypothesis that underlying the changes in consciousness brought about by meditation or psychoactive

THE BECKLEY FOUNDATION

substances, chanting, falling in love, or any other technique is expansion of blood to brain capillaries, so that suddenly we have billions more brain cells combusting simultaneously, which widens the field of connectivity and increases the perception, and I'm hoping very shortly that we'll solve some of these problems and thereby enable us to understand more fully how consciousness is altered and enhanced.

Another part of the Beckley's scientific programme is the study of cannabis, amazingly in all the studies which have been done, no-one has concentrated on investigating what are the neurophysiological underpinnings of the experience people find beneficial. The UN says 200,000,000 people use cannabis worldwide. What are the benefits that come from its use and what is the underpinning of these benefits? So this first study I am doing with Professor David Nutt of Bristol University, who is a world renowned psychopharmacologist, and we are looking into the changes in blood supply, neurotransmitters, GABA and glutamate. Why is it that some people are anxious with the use of cannabis and some people use it as a suppresser of anxiety? Is that dose related, or is it due to individual differences in biochemistry? In this study we're going to use a vapouriser so that one gets the whole product as opposed to just using the tea which gives a false picture and getting a population of people who are very happy to be in a rather unpleasant MRI machine for further studies and MEG machine which isn't so unpleasant.

In the scientific programme there are basically two other major topics which we're researching, one is meditation and that's very exciting. It started with a pilot study with a very high level meditator Sister Jayanti whom I asked to come to a MEG machine, a great big modern, the most recent machine in the nursery of neuroscience and she was asked to meditate for 20 minutes. She said she had one of the most high and beautiful meditations she'd had for a very long time, filled with light and love and mystical experience. So we got a snapshot of that state of her brain which was very fascinating and what it showed was the synchronisation in the motor and sensory parts of the brain and an amazing increase in Gamma brainwaves in the cerebellum. Sent up higher than anyone had ever seen strangely, and in the right cerebellum, I think, is a very un-understood part of the brain and certain other experts agree with me, its not just a part of the brain which does automated functioning, a very low, deep and in a way I find it is rather beautiful that deep mystical experiences would be registered in that part of the brain and I think this is the first study to ever show that because it's the first person probably who's ever had a mystical experience in a MEG machine. From this has come now a new development of collaboration with a very interesting group of scientists, the plan is to take EEGs and MEGs of a large population of people who have these experiences, and then design a brain computer interface machine. In order to do this, one needs to map the brain of high-level meditators through EEG and MEG and then create a bio-feedback for the novice meditator, so that they can identify with the brainwaves of the high-level meditator and thereby achieve a higher level than they would normally.

Another project is one we're doing in Russia, St. Petersburg, with a leader pioneer of cerebral circulation, Professor Yuri Moskalkenko, he is a specific expert on cerebral spinal fluids dynamics.

THE BECKLEY FOUNDATION

I am also very interested in researching the use of psychedelics as an aid to psychotherapy, and there are various projects around the world which we're helping sponsor. One under design at the moment is with MDMA and the reconciliation of war, and also I'm very delighted to be associated with Roland Griffith's brilliant research at John Hopkins to do with the use of psilocybin and the spiritual experience.

Peter Gasser who is in the process of getting permissions to do research into LSD as a palliative care to help with the anxiety of dying. I feel that in England it's getting a little easier, the concept that we could do research here both in psychotherapy and neuroscience using these incredibly exciting and important molecules. I think this is partly due to the Beckley Foundation's seminars, which I have been organising for five or six years. At these seminars come important people from around the world, where they can discuss in complete privacy. They can discuss these topics without fear of being censored or repeated. In 2005 there was a seminar at the House of Lords which was about global drug policy and how it affects scientific and medical research, and that was chaired by Colin Blakemore, and it has a very distinguished participant list including Bob Schuster the ex-Director of NIDA, and many other important scientists. And they all agreed that this research needs to be opened up, so I think if we go ahead in the most careful, cautious way and with the best designed protocols making sure that no accidents happen, hopefully in the next five to ten years a lot of research will take place. The aim of us understanding more about how these states come about and how they can be integrated into society and help poor, suffering mankind tackle these problems.

The Beckley Foundation also had an important part to play in the development of the recent Lancet article written by Colin Blakemore and Dave Nutt, about a new scale of harm of classification for drugs. It was first proposed at the Beckley Foundation's seminar in 2003. This scale would be scientifically-based and would be constantly reviewed as scientific knowledge advances. Ecstasy comes eighteenth on the list of harms, right near the bottom, however it is currently classified as a Class A drug. In the UK annual deaths from all of these illegal drugs is about 1,500, from alcohol it's about 40,000, from tobacco it's about 114,000. 90 percent of all drug-related deaths are alcohol and tobacco related. Now no-one is suggesting they should be made illegal, but it is very interesting to have them as correlations to currently what is in England in Class A and in America in Schedule 1. Most people use illegal drugs with no problem either to themselves or society. It's maybe at the most ten percent which become the problem users, and that 10 percent cause 99 percent of the cost to society – medical costs, crime costs. Rather than concentrate on eradication of all drugs, as was the stated aim of the UN, it would probably be more rewarding to concentrate on that 10 percent of problem users. No other area of government would lay down policies 40 years ago and regardless of the fact of whether they are achieving their aims or not, continue throwing hundreds of billions of dollars at it each year. And it has really come to a point when countries need to evaluate the process and the perfect time is at the UN Assembly which will occur in 2008, which will review the last 10 years of drug policy and set the agenda for the next 10 years. And one of the projects we are involved in at the moment is to set up a Cannabis Commission which will cover all areas of cannabis, from the health and how its regulated at the moment, and what are the repercussions of that to do with incarceration, use and how well it works, and then looking at how different countries

THE BECKLEY FOUNDATION

interpret the UN conventions. And finally examining how the conventions themselves could be amended.

The Beckley Foundation attempts to work with governments in the sense of helping them to make better decisions by commissioning reports which evaluate the effectiveness of different policies. We also started two other organisations: the International Society for the Study of Drug Policy, which was set up for analysts and scientists to collaborate at a global level, and the International Drug Policy Consortium for NGOs from around the world to network and work together and try to work out what policies might be more effective at limiting harms while at the same time recognising people's personal liberties. Although it doesn't look obvious that changes are happening, I think there is a big change behind the scenes, and if we prepare information and research, there will suddenly come a time when society is ready to use that research, so whatever we're all doing isn't wasted. I think its building up information for the future and I think we are all very lucky to be involved in this fascinating area of human research