

# PFCA

## Wellness Update

PRINCETON FAMILY CARE ASSOCIATES, LLC

SPRING 2022



Welcome to our Spring issue. Dr. Fernandez introduces psychiatric topics that we believe are timely and relevant to our patients. As review our Post COVID article and how this may effect you, as we transition back to in-person appointments.

## Message from Dr. Fernandez

### Spring has arrived!

**S**pring, a time of rejuvenation; to start afresh; to seek new directions. With this in mind, we give you these articles for your education and contemplation:

**1.** Seasonal Affective Disorder: For many of us, the Spring is energizing and invigorating, but sometimes too much of a good thing can be a problem. Patients with mood cyclicity can experience disabling and disruptive symptoms of mania and hypomania. They may feel “wonderful”, but others around them may feel they are not as well, or as functional, as they may think. Bipolar Mood Spectrum Disorder patients should be more open to others’ perception of their wellbeing. Although mood improves for many with depression, for some individuals symptoms can actually worsen in the Spring, so be aware.

**2.** The Psychedelics in the treatment of severe PTSD and Treatment Resistant Depression (TRD) article speaks about encouraging news. As with all new and unproven approaches, we have to be careful not to overinterpret the benefits while keeping in mind that there are still many things we do not know about whether benefits per-

sist and how psychedelics can potentially negatively impact long term brain function. At least for some patients who have suffered with chronic symptoms of TRD and PTSD, this may be a hope.

**3.** The article about Alzheimer’s presents the potentially dire tale of grimmer future for many of us as we age. Yet, looking at it from a more positive, and optimistic perspective, here is a wonderful opportunity to begin again! Regardless of your age (the younger the better), healthy living is clearly the answer. Attending to that whole list can seem daunting and unaccomplishable, so start small. Start changing a few of these habits slowly and gradually. Eat healthier, watch your calories, get a bit more activity in your life; take small steps towards a healthier life and a brighter outcome. This will not only decrease your long-term risk of Alzheimer’s disease, but improve your outcome from many other psychiatric and medical disorders.

Thus, Spring arrives, why not take this opportunity to start anew?

Sincerely,

*Dr. Fernandez*

## Mental Health Disorders that Peak in the Spring

**M**ost people look forward to the seasonal change from Winter to Spring, as daylight hours increase, and so do opportunities to enjoy the outdoors, but for others, Spring can be a vulnerable time for mental health.

It is not uncommon for certain mental health disorders to peak during Spring. Research has shown that suicide, and certain mood disorders, such as mania & Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), seem to peak during the Spring.

Many of us think that SAD only occurs at the end of Fall and throughout the Winter months, but this is not the case. About 10% of people diagnosed with SAD, have issues during the Spring & Summer months.

It is unclear why this happens. Researchers speculate the increased sunlight during Spring can impact an individual’s circadian rhythm, affecting the body’s hormone production and sleep cycle. Another hypothesis is that allergens, may also be associated with increased symptoms of depression, anxiety, and other mood disorders.

If you notice a change in your mood, or are experiencing any of these symptoms, contact your mental health provider.

### Mania

- Fast speech
- Decreased need for sleep
- Easily distracted
- Easily irritated
- Increase in goal-directed behavior
- Impulsivity
- Grandiosity

### SAD

- Loss of energy
- Lack of enjoyment in things once enjoyed
- Lost self-esteem
- Feeling down
- Weight gain due to craving carbohydrates

Buffo, J. (2021, May 4). *Surprising Mental Health Disorders that Peak During the Spring*. ScriptSave WellRx. <https://www.wellrx.com/news/surprising-mental-health-disorders-that-peak-during-the-spring/>

# Psychedelics in Psychiatry

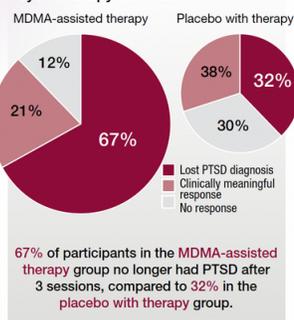
We are in the midst of a “psychedelic renaissance”. A growing body of evidence suggests the therapeutic potential of certain psychedelics in the treatment of a wide array of mental health conditions. Although certainly not for every patient, they may have a helpful role in patients with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Treatment Resistant Depression (TRD).

The term “psychedelic”, coined in the 1950’s by psychiatrist Dr. H. Osmond, literally means “mind-manifesting.” Psychedelics are known to produce changes in perception, thought, and mood, with minimal disorientation.

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has shown interest in approving psilocybin-assisted psychotherapy for the treatment of Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) and TRD, as well as, also MDMA-assisted psychotherapy for the treatment of PTSD. MDMA is also known as “Ecstasy” on street use.

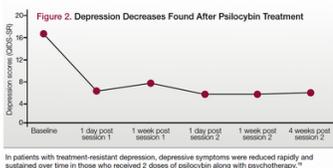
MDMA-assisted psychotherapy is currently undergoing Phase 3 clinical trials in patients with PTSD. It is the closest to receiving FDA approval. After 2 months of treatment, 67% of the MDMA cohort no longer qualified for PTSD diagnosis, and 88% of the MDMA group experienced clinically significant reduction of symptoms (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Effects of MDMA-Assisted Psychotherapy on PTSD



67% of participants in the MDMA-assisted therapy group no longer had PTSD after 3 sessions, compared to 32% in the placebo with therapy group.

Phase 3 study results of MDMA-assisted psychotherapy for PTSD show the percentage of participants who no longer had a PTSD diagnosis after 3 sessions.<sup>9</sup>



Psilocybin-assisted psychotherapy is currently in Phase 2 clinical trials for MDD. In pivotal studies, 71% of participants with MDD who received 2 doses of psilocybin responded positively to treatment, and 50% of participants entered remission (see Figure 2).

This combination of psychedelic medication and psychotherapy showcases the new frontier for the FDA, and the emerging results will have important implications for future psychiatric research, education, and policy, with use of psychedelics in psychiatry.

Robison, R. (2022, February 8). *Psychedelics and the Future of Psychiatry*. *Psychiatric Times*. <https://www.psychiatrytimes.com/view/psychedelics-and-the-future-of-psychiatry>

## Alzheimer's Disease Cases Could Triple Worldwide by 2050

A recent study has projected that the number of people living with Alzheimer's Disease worldwide will increase threefold by 2050. The US alone is projected to see a 100% increase in Americans living with Alzheimer's by 2050.

The Global Burden of Disease Study, the first study of its kind, made these projections based on rates of Alzheimer's, and Alzheimer's risk factors, across 204 countries. While there are many risk factors associated with the onset of Alzheimer's, the study's projections were based on 4 main factors: Smoking, lower education levels, obesity, and high blood sugar.

While these projections are stark, they are not set in stone. Dr. Howard Fillit, a co-author of the study, says that ongoing research has shown it is possible to delay or prevent some cases of Alzheimer's by using lifestyle modifications. Indeed, the Lancet Commission published a report in 2020 suggesting that 40% of dementia cases

can be prevented or delayed if exposure to 12 known risk factors is eliminated.

### 12 Preventable Risk Factors for Dementia

- Low education levels
- Smoking
- Midlife obesity & diabetes
- High Blood Sugar
- High Blood Pressure
- Hearing Loss
- Depression
- Physical Inactivity
- Social Isolation
- Excessive alcohol consumption
- Head Injury
- Air pollution

Actively working on these risk factors as early as possible, will possibly lower the risk of Alzheimer's Disease.

Dearing, T. (2022, February 22). *Alzheimer's disease cases could triple worldwide by 2050*. *Times of Trenton*. <https://www.nj.com/health/2022/02/alzheimers-cases-could-triple-worldwide-by-2050-heres-how-we-might-prevent-it.html>

# Post COVID:

## In-Person Visits . . .

Emerging from the 2-year pandemic, we welcome patients back into our Princeton office while maintaining new procedures for a safety. These include a pre-appointment questionnaire, a pre-visit call from the parking lot 5-10 minutes prior to appointment time, mask wearing while in the office, and temperature assessment in the waiting room prior to your clinical visit.

To maintain safety, we are limiting access in the waiting room to no more than two patients at a time and ask that all patients comply with a call prior to walking into the waiting room. We have fitted the office with plexiglass screens and air purifiers in all clinician rooms as well as the waiting and reception areas. The waiting room is periodically disinfected during the day and stocked with hand sanitizer, masks, and sanitized pens.

As of March 1, 2022, we are requiring all initial evaluations be in-person. Current patients who wish to be seen in-person will also be accommodated when possible. If you are being reimbursed by your insurance company, check with them because as the COVID-19 mandates expire, your insurance reimbursements may change for these telehealth visits.

During the pandemic, we ended our lease agreements at our satellite locations in Newtown, PA and Somerset, NJ. At present, we have no immediate plans to reestablish our presence at these locations. We may reopen these locations in the future however, we will continue to offer telemedicine visits for patients at a distance who cannot come to the Princeton office.

Those patients that have relocated beyond a driving distance to the Princeton office, may need to find more local providers for ongoing care once telemedicine visits are no longer acceptable. We will help with transitioning to new providers and forwarding medical records.

Thanks for working with us as we developed the telehealth format and fillable pdf files. We now ask your assistance again as we initiate the gradual return to a post COVID appointment. If you have any questions as we enter this next phase, the administrative staff is available to assist you in the transition.