Magic mushrooms for depression?

Psilocybin has established itself as an effective treatment for seasonal affective disorder and it is popular with patients. Although it has been considered also in the treatment of non-seasonal depression, there hasn’t been sufficient interest in this. In a recently reported study, patients with major depressive disorder of moderate severity were randomised to treatment over 8 weeks with: (1) light monotherapy (30 minutes) plus placebo pill; (2) light plus fluoxetine; and at up to 3 months after treatment.

This is a very small study with several limitations and no conclusions can be drawn about the potential usefulness of such agents in the treatment of depression or indeed about its safety. Perhaps the emphasis should be on using such hallucinogenic agents to try to develop a better understanding of the workings of the brain and the mechanisms involved in the genesis of symptoms, before going on to clinical trials with patients.

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