

Left: Alexandra Kriz, co-founder of Phoenix Nest Community Project, calls her center “a sacred space with clinical safety.”

Concurrently, local medical practice Interventional Pain Solutions—which has provided ketamine infusions to pain patients for years—broadened its therapeutic scope and launched Norcal Ketamine Infusion Centers.

Situated on the ground floor of an office complex on Humboldt Road, Phoenix Nest’s facility features a handful of therapy rooms, each distinctly decorated. Clients choose whichever feels most comfortable. The setting matters because of ketamine’s psychoactive properties. Staff include Dr. R. Carter Clements, an emergency physician who commutes from Orinda to work for the clinic; registered nurse Lori Moreno; and Kriz, who’s completing her Ph.D. in clinical psychology.

“We refer to our center as a sacred space with clinical safety,” Kriz said. “Our approach to things, rather than making it about the medicine, is making it about the human connection and the experience that comes along with the use of the medicine.”

The practitioners behind Interventional Pain Solutions recognize the same thing. That’s why they’ve created a separate setup via Norcal Ketamine Infusion Centers, which will grow beyond the single Chico location on East Avenue to Redding and Lincoln, other cities served by the pain-management practice. As at Phoenix Nest, the infusion center features quiet rooms where patients listen to music and relax during treatments.

“We’ve had really good results with the ketamine for refractory depression [i.e., resistant to treatment], PTSD, obviously chronic pain,” said Dr. Zachary Lipman, an anesthesiologist and pain medicine specialist with the practice. “Therapies don’t work for everybody. So when you have something that’s new and different that somebody hasn’t tried, I think there’s a big need for it.”

Proven treatment

Ketamine dates to the 1960s as an anesthetic for animals that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved for human use in 1970. It’s particularly safe because, at proper dosages, it doesn’t slow the heart or breathing—unlike other anesthetics—but ketamine does create a dissociative experience that led the federal government to classify it as a controlled substance.

It works in the brain on opiate receptors as well as receptors for glutamate, a chemical through which neurons communicate.

Ketamine therapy in Chico

Phoenix Nest Community Project: 1459 Humboldt Rd., Ste. A, phoenixnestproject.com

Norcal Ketamine Infusion Centers: 647 W. East Ave., norcalpaindocs.com



Dr. Zachary Lipman’s practice, Interventional Pain Solutions, has expanded its scope via Norcal Ketamine Infusion Centers.

Research released by the National Institutes of Health has validated the efficacy of ketamine for not just anesthesia or pain but also PTSD and severe depression.

“The data on that is really profoundly positive,” Clements told the CN&R by phone in reference to ketamine’s antidepressive properties. “You won’t necessarily cure their depression, but you’ll cure their suicidality with a single treatment—which, when you think about it, is just amazing, because there aren’t a lot of therapies in medicine that work that well with a single dose.”

Whether by injection at Phoenix Nest or infusion at Norcal, the regimen may require one, a few or a handful of treatments, with an additional dose after several months. A session at Phoenix Nest incorporates pre- and post-treatment counseling, runs 90 minutes to two hours and costs \$600—though the nonprofit has a sliding scale based on income. Norcal is cash pay, too, at \$400 per 40-minute treatment.

“There’s a stigma,” Lipman said, referring to recreational use of the drug nicknamed Special K. “[An anesthetic like] Propofol, in the hands of the wrong person, can kill Michael Jackson [for example]; you have to be careful with any anesthetic. But in the hands of a professional, [ketamine is] a very effective medication for these uses.”

Clements agreed. He joined Phoenix Nest because of the need he—like Kriz—saw locally to address trauma. He currently works two days a week in Chico but next month will increase his commitment to three.

“I think that the use of ketamine to crack the shell on problems that can otherwise be very difficult to get the patient to open up about is groundbreaking,” he said. “It’s a revolution in psychiatric and psychologic care.” □

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