BHRS Ketamine Position Statement

Ketamine is a controlled dissociative anesthetic agent that is a racemic mixture of S-ketamine (esketamine) and R-ketamine. It is commonly used for anesthesia and is also an emerging off-label treatment for mood disorders, although its efficacy and safety for this indication have not been evaluated in large-scale clinical trials. Ketamine has the potential for abuse, addiction, and diversion due to its transient euphoric hallucinogenic effects.

Based on the available research and current regulatory guidelines, we take a cautious stance on the use of ketamine and its derivatives in the treatment of psychiatric disorders. At this time, ketamine is not approved for use in psychiatry and should only be administered under controlled settings with adequate monitoring parameters under the guidance of trained medical professional. Although ketamine shows potential as a treatment for various psychiatric disorders, significant concerns and unanswered questions remain regarding its use.

Given the limited evidence-based support at this time, we consider ketamine therapy for psychiatric conditions as experimental and investigational. While BHRS providers cannot recommend or endorse outpatient non-FDA approved ketamine treatment, we recognize the need for further research to fully understand the safety and efficacy of these treatments in various psychiatric conditions. In rare and exceptional cases, it could be considered as a potential treatment option for patients who have not responded to other evidence-based treatments. High-quality clinical trials are needed to evaluate the long-term safety and efficacy of ketamine for psychiatric disorders. We also emphasize that we do not support the use of oral ketamine since studies as to safety and feasibility are lacking. Future research is necessary to fully understand the benefits and risks of these treatments, as well as to determine the optimal dosages, administration routes, duration of treatment and net benefit on health outcomes.

This position statement specifically addresses the non-FDA approved use of ketamine in psychiatry. It is important to note that Esketamine (Spravato) has received FDA approval for the treatment of treatment-resistant depression and depressive symptoms in adults with Major Depressive Disorder who have acute suicidal ideation or behavior. However, the use of esketamine requires careful consideration and close monitoring, and it is only available through a Risk Evaluation and Mitigation Strategy program. BHRS providers may consider FDA approved esketamine for special cases in consultation with the medical director, if the client meets the referral criteria.