



# INTREATMENT

FIRST PERSON: **SAM MANDEL**

*Sam Mandel wants to open eyes—and unlock mental health—for anyone suffering.*

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF  
Ketamine Clinics Los Angeles

*Since he was a child, Sam Mandel has wanted to help others suffering from mental health disorders, like depression and addiction. He has gone from volunteering with like-minded organizations as a teenager to founding the Ketamine Clinics Los Angeles to continue his goal to advocate for mental health.*

My greatest honor and challenge has been co-creating Ketamine Clinics Los Angeles (KCLA) with my father, Dr. Steven L. Mandel, and serving as CEO. I'd like to share our incredible journey from humble beginnings through a cascade of transformations and the exciting promise of what's to come.

Our journey began in a small plastic surgery suite in Santa Monica, where my father headed the anesthesiology department. In that confined space, measuring only seven by eight feet, we set out to provide ketamine infusion therapy for individuals struggling with depression, anxiety, PTSD, suicidality, and various mental health conditions. We created our humble workspace with a simple folding table, two chairs, the glow of two laptops, and a prepaid cell phone from Radio Shack. I still have the original Motorola flip phone manual with "Ketamine Phone" written across the cover in red Sharpie.

After about one year of sitting at the same folding table, we decided some real desks and desk chairs were necessary. I framed the sketch of the little closet we called home, created by the furniture company that made our custom furniture for us. We needed the custom pieces to maximize every inch—literally. As I write this, I am sitting at one of those original desks from 2014. We added a narrow steel cabinet for some supplies, and voilà, KCLA got its first makeover.

We cared for patients in the operating room recovery area on the other side of our little office. After a couple of years of this, we realized the need for more space, especially since using the restroom was a coordinated effort due to the confinement of our

space. Musical chairs ensued constantly. The mere act of breathing could be disruptive, and the OR recovery area wasn't the warm and comforting treatment space we desired for our patients. So we took the leap of faith and got our own space in Brentwood, on the Wilshire Corridor of Los Angeles.

In Brentwood, we found 1,700 square feet of our very own! What did we do with such a massive upgrade? We cramped ourselves in almost as much. Like a goldfish, we got into a bigger bowl and grew fast to fill it.

In early 2016, we hired a couple of nurses, and Alyssa joined as our first patient care coordinator. Soon after, we added Angel, our director of operations, and Denisse, one of our favorite nurses. I am so grateful that Alyssa, Angel, and Denisse continue to be pillars of our organization. Their loyalty and dedication to the team and our patients are truly cherished.

A tapestry of extraordinary experiences has marked our shared journey, but a few adventures stand out. One fateful Monday morning, we came into work to find our entire suite flooded from the water tower on the roof of the Brentwood building. Ceiling tiles soaked up water until they burst into hundreds of sponge-like bits all over the suite. We cleaned up and started seeing patients without delay or a ceiling that day. Another time, there was a bomb threat that locked down the whole building for a while. Since no one was allowed in or out, we continued to care for the patients already in the clinic. What else could we do? On a dark and stormy day, we had a power outage, leaving us with the choice of closing or using lanterns to work;

we chose the latter. Batteries powered our infusion pumps and vital monitors. I weathered the storm for a wild trip to the hardware store for headlamps.

Treatment must go on.

Our Brentwood space offered us three treatment rooms, a large back office, a waiting room, a reception area, a galley, and a bathroom. I made the galley my office and sat at a kitchen table, wedged in the corner between the staff fridge and the wall. If I ever forgot I was working in a kitchen, a bump from the fridge door reminded me; a collision that happened every time someone opened it to retrieve their lunch or juice for a recovering patient. If the fridge bump wasn't enough, the constant smells from microwaved food and interruptions from those waiting for said food were enough to remind me my "office" wasn't an office at all; it was a kitchen.

These inadvertent one-minute daily meetings I got to have one-on-one with the entire team may have contributed to our success, but there is no doubt they also contributed to my current hairdo—bald. There were better environments for a founder to build a new business, but this one was mine.

After three years here, we needed more space. Again, we took the leap of faith and acquired our current office in the Playa District at the edge of Culver City.

When the time came to move, we tackled a formidable challenge. Up until 2 p.m. on a Friday, we diligently treated patients in Brentwood and immediately after boxed up the office. The movers arrived on Saturday at 8 a.m., and by Monday at 9 a.m., we were ready to welcome patients to our new Culver City location.

There were countless obstacles to overcome to get the timing right. Some things didn't go as planned, but we did it. Though Spectrum Internet had to send three trucks for six hours after realizing no one in any department of Spectrum would know peace until KCLA had working internet that Saturday, we got it done.

We've had so many wild events and bizarre situations—I couldn't possibly describe half of them. The only thing that truly matters is we always showed up for our patients and each other, no matter what. Shared purpose and trust are unbeatable qualities of our team. These moments bonded our longtime staff early on; undoubtedly, we are stronger together.

When we arrived in Culver City, we built 3,600 square feet from scratch—a blank canvas we could make our own. We meticulously chose every little detail, ensuring our new space exuded beauty, prioritized safety, and offered optimal comfort. As we grew, more clinical and administrative teammates came aboard, and after five years of relentless dedication and 70- and 80-hour weeks, I finally got an office of my own. We renovated this suite at the end of 2022 and expanded into the adjacent space next door. We now have 5,000 square feet and a team of 17 exceptional employees.



Today, KCLA stands as a beacon of hope and healing, having touched the lives of more than 5,000 patients and administered more than 20,000 infusions. Our passion and dedication to relieving suffering has yielded an impressive 83 percent success rate. In the realm of mental health disorders, we have fearlessly pioneered ketamine treatment, elevating it from obscurity to the forefront of mainstream recognition. Amidst a sea of misinformation and ignorance, we have diligently disseminated accurate knowledge, empowering individuals with the truth. We have loyally stuck with ketamine for so long, not because we are so in love with it, but because we are in love





with helping people to transform and heal. At KCLA, we have repeatedly proven that ketamine can unlock new realms of possibility and is simply the most effective tool we have available.

At the start of 2023, KCLA ventured further into integrative mental health and added psychiatric medication management, transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS), and Spravato to our services. These additional services reinforce our commitment to more comprehensive care.

Recognizing the importance of accessibility, we have gone in network with nine of California's largest health insurance plans. KCLA has blossomed into a comprehensive mental health clinic at the forefront of evidence-based treatments. Within our state-of-the-art facility, we deliver these innovations with a personalized touch guided by the most compassionate and knowledgeable team in our field. As the scientific evidence supporting the safety and efficacy of MDMA, psilocybin, and other psychedelics continues to emerge and FDA approval follows, we eagerly anticipate incorporating these therapies into our practice.

Although we prioritize quality over quantity by focusing on one large, single site, our commitment to excellence leaves room for future expansion. As we refine our operations, we remain open to establishing additional locations, broadening our reach, and serving more individuals in need. Over the course of nearly a decade, my father and I have meticulously built this practice with the sole passion and desire to help people heal. When we embarked on this journey, we did not seek investors or business partners—it was just the two of us, some credit cards, and a

little cash in the formative days. We faced tremendous opposition from everyone, but we didn't let it deter us because the health outcomes we witnessed spoke volumes.

At the heart of KCLA's ongoing greatness is our remarkable team.

I value each individual. From the long-term dreamers who came aboard a ship that set sail as she was still being assembled to the newest teammates who started their journey with us on an elegant cruise liner a few months ago. I'm so grateful for all of them and the world-class work they do every single day. I live for the opportunity to serve this team and our community. The resilience and strength of our patients inspire me to persevere, as does the collaboration of fellow clinicians who tirelessly strive to make a tangible difference in the lives we serve.

As KCLA reshapes and redefines mental health care, we set our sights on ambitious plans for the rest of 2023 and even bigger ones for 2024. I am personally excited about the abundant opportunities and the challenges ahead. Together, we will continue transforming lives and igniting a paradigm shift in mental well-being. **LM**

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Mandel (center right)  
with the KCLA  
care team