

## A thirty year perspective: Medicine's changing views toward NDEs

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## Outline of presentation

- NDEs and medicine 30 years ago
- Factors leading to greater acceptance of NDEs by healthcare professionals
- NDEs and medicine today
- How healthcare professionals can help people with NDEs
- My view of the future of NDEs and medicine

## NDEs and medicine 30 years ago

- Texas Medical Center
- Large medical centers were using Coronary Artery Bypass surgery to save lives.
- Transplant surgery was in its infancy.
- MD Anderson was one of the most prestigious cancer centers of the world.
- Few people mentioned NDEs.

## Common experiences of people who had NDEs 30 years ago

- Health care professionals wouldn't listen to patients talk about their NDEs.
- Patients were told a NDE was a hallucination.
- They were often given tranquilizers.
- They might be referred to a psychiatrist or chaplain.
- They often were psychiatrically labeled for life.
- If they insisted on their NDE, they might have a psychiatric hospitalization.

## Factors leading to changing attitudes by healthcare professionals

- Increased absolute numbers of NDEs through improved resuscitative techniques
- Increasing awareness of NDEs in the lay public
- Increasing permission to speak about NDEs and insistence on telling their stories
- Improved education about NDEs
- Increased research about NDEs

### Factors leading to increased incidence of survivors of CPR

- Improved resuscitative techniques in the hospital, including improved ICUs and development of specialty of intensivists
- Greater education of public about performing CPR on people with cardiac arrests in the community
- The addition of Automatic External Defibrillators (AEDs) in public places

### Percentage of survivors of CPR who report a NDE

- Between 11-30% of all people who survive cardiac arrest report a NDE.
- Early studies by Sabom (adults) and Morse (children) reported about 30%.
- In Dr. Parnia's study of 63 survivors, 11% reported a NDE.
- In Dr. van Lommel's 2001 study in the Netherlands, 18% of 344 cardiac arrest survivors reported a NDE.

### Absolute number of people with NDEs

- 8 million adults in the U.S. in 1982 (Gallup poll)
- Estimated 13 million adults today in the U.S. based on current population and increased rate of successful cardiac resuscitation.
- Dr. Jeff Long estimates 774 people/day in the U.S. have a NDE. ([www.nderf.org](http://www.nderf.org) site)

### Increased awareness of NDEs in the lay public

- Moody's book, *Life after Life*, 1975
- In 1975 most people only told one or two people about their NDE if they told anyone.
- IANDS was formed in 1978 to increase awareness of NDEs.
- More books about NDEs were published.

### More factors leading to increased public awareness of NDEs

- NDEs were discussed on talk shows.
- NDE stories moved from National Enquirer to Good Housekeeping
- NDEs became a household word.
- Rise of hospice movement increased public awareness of NDEs in those close to death.

### Role of hospice in awareness of NDEs

- Rise of hospice movement since first hospice in Branford, CT in 1974.
- By 1979, 26 hospices were certified by Medicare and Medicaid.
- The Medicare Hospice benefit was initiated in 1980.
- Now there is a hospice in every town in the U.S.

### NDEs and hospice

- People who are near death often have spontaneous NDEs that are often very helpful in accepting impending death.
- Both loved ones and healthcare professionals have been educated by people dying on hospice service.

### Factors leading to increased awareness of healthcare professionals about NDEs

- Insistence of patients on telling their own stories to their healthcare professional.
- NDE research in medical journals
- Education of healthcare professionals in training including "Spirituality and Health" classes in medical schools
- "The Day I Died" BBC film distributed to medical schools through IANDS

### Increasing NDE research

- More peer reviewed medical journals are accepting articles on NDE research.
- Nursing journals were among the first to publish articles on NDEs.
- Lancet, 2001—Dr. van Lommel
- Dr. Greyson has published in Death Studies, Psychiatry, Journal of Ob-Gyn, etc.
- A serious field of inquiry that is funded.

### "Spirituality and Health" courses in medical schools

- The Templeton Foundation through the George Washington Institute for Spirituality and Health has funded courses in medical schools and research grants for specialty departments.
- Currently 2/3 of 142 medical schools have Spirituality and Health courses.

### IANDS "The Day I Died" project

- "The Day I Died," produced by BBC, looks at the research behind NDEs and the personal experience of people with NDEs.
- Through a gift, IANDS will distribute 20 videos to 20 medical schools.
- Chris Lorenc, University of North Texas graduate student, reviewed applications from medical schools. Accepted schools receive a video and a 20 page study guide.

### Current medical schools involved in the "Day I Died" video project

- MD Anderson Cancer Center
- Baylor College of Medicine
- Mayo College of Medicine
- Stanford University School of Medicine
- University of Washington
- Howard University College of Medicine
- University of Calgary
- University of Florida College of Medicine

### Other medical schools in the "Day I Died" education project

- University of Kentucky
- University of California at Davis
- University of California at Los Angeles
- Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science/Chicago Medical School
- University of Indiana Medical School
- University of Connecticut Medical School
- Duke University

### Other institutions receiving "The Day I Died"

- Institute of Noetic Science in California
- Rhine Institute in North Carolina
- Portsmouth Navy Medical Center in Virginia
- Roberts Wesleyan College (Social work) in Rochester, NY
- University of St. Thomas School of Theology in St. Paul, MN
- Hospice of Western Colorado
- Universal Health Services, Fort Worth TX

### Increased awareness of NDEs in psychologists, social workers and chaplains

- In 1975 many psychologists considered an NDE an aberration that required a psychiatric diagnosis. Now DSM IV has a category for "Religious or Spiritual Problem" (V62.89)
- Social workers and psychologists have workshops on working with people with NDEs.

### What we now know about how healthcare professionals can help people with NDEs

- Expect an NDE if a person was resuscitated or is close to death.
- Be alert for signs that a person has had an NDE. They are very sensitive to loud noises and violence (including TV.)
- Ask open-ended questions—let them tell their own story in their own time.
- Have information about NDEs.
- First person told is very important in adjustment process. (Debbie James, 1996 thesis work)

The NDE is one aspect of experience that has led scientists to consider the possibility that consciousness is non-local

### The nonlocality of consciousness

- People have reported awareness of physical details during NDEs when they had a flat EEG: the Pam Reynolds case.
- Reports of visitations from deceased loved ones at the moment of death
- Studies showing healing at a distance, especially through prayer (Larry Dossey)

### NDEs and medicine in the future

- All healthcare professionals will be taught about NDEs in training.
- NDEs will be considered a natural part of the human experience.
- NDEs will be a major impetus to research that leads to the expansion of our understanding of human consciousness.

### NDEs in medical education

- Awareness that all healthcare professionals will encounter people with NDEs
- A natural part of the Spirituality and Health courses
- A natural part of ethics courses
- A natural part of death and dying education
- A natural part of complementary therapies education

### NDEs in the hospital setting

- All healthcare professionals will know the basics of NDEs.
- Every hospital will have someone who is an expert in NDEs to assist people after CPRs—a nurse, social worker, physician, or chaplain.
- Supportive teams or buddies will be available like we now have for cancer survivors.
- Knowledge about NDEs will be a part of continuing education programs.

### NDEs and research

- Studies on veridical perception will continue.
- Beneficial approaches to people with NDEs will be studied.
- Best ways to teach health care professionals about NDEs will be studied.
- The impact of knowing about NDEs will be studied more extensively.
- The study of NDEs will be a part of the study of consciousness.

### Impact of NDEs on healthcare professionals

- One more reminder that our understanding of medicine and human consciousness is always growing
- Hearing value changes from people who have had NDEs reminds us to take time for quiet, nature, and our loved ones.
- Reminds us that not all of our patients fear death and that death is a natural part of life.

### Impact of NDEs on our world

- As NDEs are seen as a natural part of human experience, the values of those who have had NDEs will be seen as a normative part of human experience.
- Our world will move toward understanding the importance of love, forgiveness, and right relationship and away from an emphasis on success and material possessions.

When I look back on the years between 1975 and 2005, I see it as the time when NDEs and hospice influenced vast numbers of people to live their lives in a different way.

When I look ahead to the next thirty years, I see it as a time when NDEs and other spiritually transformative experiences will change how ALL of us live our lives.