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 site)

Increased awareness of NDEs in the lay public

- 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 Lorenz, 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 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.