

History, Controversy, and Ethical Implications In the Field of Near-Death Studies

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A greeting card...

- When a major greeting card company stakes its profit on its customers' recognition of the "bright light" in near-death experiences (NDEs), you know that the phenomenon of NDEs has become integrated into U.S. culture.



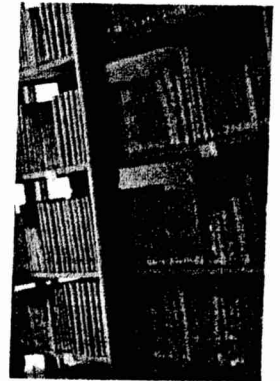
Today's presentation...

- History of the field of near-death studies
- Controversy in the field
- Ethical implications arising from the field



History in the Field of Near-Death Studies

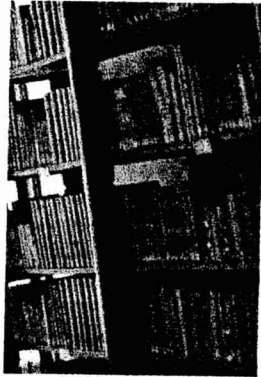
- Resuscitation technology
- Raymond Moody, MD, PhD, 1975, *Life after Life*
 - Coined the term "near-death experience"
 - Over 13 million copies sold
 - Translated into 26 languages
 - Increased awareness of and curiosity about NDEs substantially.



History in the Field of Near-Death Studies

However, books making reference to NDEs appeared in writings before 1975. Some of the earliest:

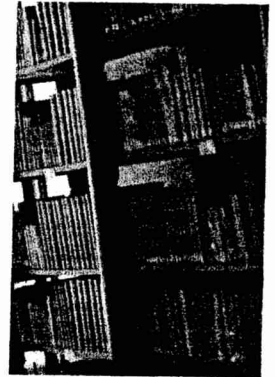
- Schoolcraft, 1825
- Livingstone, 1872
- Cozzins, 1873
- Barrow, 1848
- Clarke, 1878
- Little, 1881
- Munck, 1887
- Winslow, 1868
- Cobbe, 1882



History in the Field of Near-Death Studies

Scholarly journal articles before 1975 included:

- Wiltse, 1889
- 5 articles by James Hyslop in the early 1900's
- 4 articles sole- or first-authored by psychiatrist Russell Noyes in the early 1970's



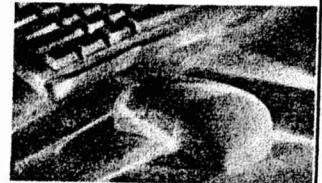
History in the Field of Near-Death Studies

- 1977: Association for the Scientific Study of Near-Death Phenomena.
- 1978: John Audette; Kenneth Ring, PhD; Michael Sabom, MD; and I: bylaws, articles of incorporation, application for tax exempt status.
- 1981: International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS). (Happy 25th anniversary, IANDS!) Among its products:
 - Scholarly journal, begun in 1981 as *Anablosis - The Journal for Near-Death Studies*; changed in 1987 to *Journal of Near-Death Studies*.
 - Quarterly newsletter, *Vital Signs*, and a variety of informational brochures.
 - Since 1989, almost-annual conferences; this year is the 15th.
 - Facilitated implementation and operation of local interest groups; over 55 exist today, most in the U.S., others in Canada, western and eastern Europe, Israel, and South Africa.
 - Website since 1995: www.lands.org; over 400,000 page hits per month.

History in the Field of Near-Death Studies

Other major websites dedicated to NDEs:

- Kevin Williams' (www.near-death.com)
 - Began in 1996; now gets about 2.5 million page hits per month
- Jeff Long, MD, and Jody Long, JD's, Near-Death Experience Research Foundation website (www.nderf.org)
 - Began in 1998; now gets about 2.5 million page hits per month
- A recent Googling of the words "near death experience" yielded results exceeding 76.4 million.

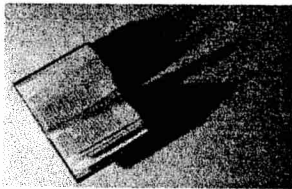


Curiosity about and interest in NDEs clearly continues.

History in the Field of Near-Death Studies

Major books by researchers (a few noteworthy)

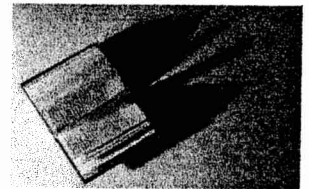
- Outside the field of medicine (Ring, 1980, 1984; Ring & Valarino, 1998; Ring & Cooper, 1999; Grey, 1985; Sutherland, 1989)
- By physicians (Sabom, 1982; Morse, 1990; Fenwick & Fenwick, 1995; Rommer, 2000; Parnia, 2006)



History in the Field of Near-Death Studies

Noteworthy edited collections include:

- Greyson & Flynn, 1984
- the American Psychological Association's (APA) 2000 book, *The Varieties of Anomalous Experience: Examining the Scientific Evidence*—the APA's first-ever publication acknowledging and addressing non-ordinary experiences.

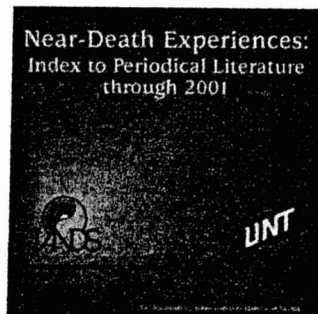


Trends in the Professional Periodical Literature

Made possible by:

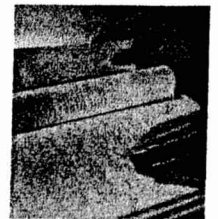
Near-Death Experiences: Index to the Periodical Literature through 2005 (Index; Holden & Christian, 2006)

- a near-exhaustive list of scholarly publications on NDEs, analyzed by 135 NDE-related topics
- a joint venture between IANDS and the University of North Texas



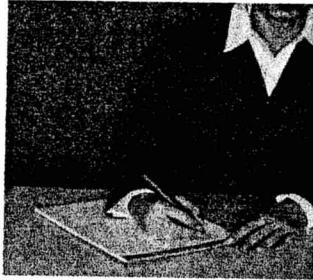
Findings

One way to categorize NDE research is to differentiate between retrospective and prospective studies.



Retrospective Studies

- Researchers did not have information about the close brush with death before and during the episode; they first learn about it after--often years after--it occurred.



- Involve "convenience samples" of research participants who voluntarily come forward in response to a researcher's call for participants
- Less representative sample but easier and less expensive to conduct

Prospective Studies

- Researchers have information about the NDEr's close brush with death before and during the episode



- Usually conducted in hospitals over a period of a few months
- Tend to be more thorough, difficult, and expensive

The following analysis...

- Is based on the *Index* mentioned earlier.
- Excludes the numerous individual case studies of NDErs.

Listing of most U.S. retrospective studies with more than one research participant published through 2005.

- Mostly scholarly journal publications
- Some books

Year	Researcher	Number of NDErs	Focus
1975	Moody	150	E
1981	Ring	102	E/A
1981	Ring et al.	17	E/A
1982	Twainlow et al.	33	E
1983	Green et al.	>40	E
1983	Greynon	89	E/A
1983	Kohr	84	A
1983	Thomas et al.	>84	E
1984	Ring	111	A
1984	McLaughlin et al.	40	E/A
1985	Morse et al.	4	E
1985	Bauer	28	A
1985	Greynon	89	E
1986	Morse et al.	11	E
1988	Holden	63	E
1990	Greynon	183	E
1990	Owens et al.	58	E
1990	Ring et al.	74	E/A
1990	Sardeshdy	4	E/A
1990	Stevenson et al.	107	E
1991	Sardeshdy	10	E

Listing of most U.S. retrospective studies with more than one research participant published through 2005.
(continued)

Year	Researcher	Number of NDErs	Focus
1992	Bechtel et al.	32	E
1992	Atwater	>100	E
1992	Greyson	135	E/A
1993	Olson et al.	12	E/A
1993	Wells	14	A
1994	Gibson	100	E
1995	Hoffman	50	A/E
1997	Magraves	51	E/A
1997	Eling et al.	21	E
1998	Geoth-Marnat et al.	53	A
1998	Sullivan et al.	32	E
1998	Hoffman	53	A
2000	Reamer	>300	E/A
2001	Tulha	9	E/A
2003	Greyson	61	A
2003	Lester	51	E
2003	Long & Long	218	E/A
2003	Morris & Knoff	12	E/A
2003	Bonenfant	40	A
2004	Greyson & Lester	74	E/A
2004	Langs et al.	203	E
Total		>2478	

Listing of most retrospective studies outside U.S. with more than one research participant published through 2005.

Year	Researcher	Location	Number of NDErs	Focus
Western Europe				
1985	Grey	U.K.	32	E/A
1995	Forsick	U.K.	>330	E
1996	Paciolla	Italy	24	E
1998	Blochmore	U.K.	26	E
2001	Van Lemuel et al.	Netherlands	62	E/A
2001	Knoblauch et al.	Germany	80	E/A
Australia				
1989	Sutherland	Australia	40	A
2003	Gow et al.	Australia	30	E
2005	Purvis et al.	Australia	60	E
Non-Western Asia				
1983	Coates	Malaysia	3	E
1992	Zhi-ying et al.	China	22	E/A
1992	Panticha	India	16	E/A
1993	Blochmore	India	8	E/A
1993	Panticha	India	13	E
Total			>776	

Results: Retrospective Studies

- In the past 30 years,
 - U.S. researchers have conducted the largest number of retrospective studies—at least 42,
 - Involving sample sizes ranging from four to over 300 NDErs,
 - For a total of well over 2,000 NDEr research participants.

Results: Retrospective Studies

- Outside the U.S.,
 - At least 14 retrospective studies,
 - Most in Western countries of Europe and the country/continent of Australia, with a total sample of over 300 NDErs;
 - Five in non-Western countries of Asia, with a total sample of over 70 NDErs;
 - None so far in South America or Africa.

Prospective Studies

Year	Researcher	Location	Number of NDErs	Focus
1982	Sabom*	USA	78	E/A
1986	Greyson	USA	16	E
1990	Schnaper et al.	USA	25	E
1995	Milne	Canada	6	E
1997	Lawrence	USA	<23	E
2001	Pamia et al.	U.K.	7	E
2001	van Lommel et al.	Netherlands	62	E/A
2002	Schwaininger et al.	USA	11	A
2003	Greyson	USA	27	E
2004	Sartori	U.K.	15	E/A
Total			approx 270	

* mixed prospective and retrospective

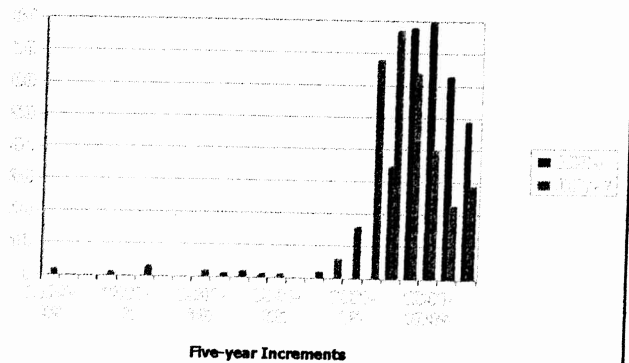
Results: Prospective Studies

- So far, prospective researchers have
 - conducted a total of 10 studies
 - in North America and Europe only,
 - involving a total of about 270 NDErs.

Results: Retrospective & Prospective Combined

- In the past three decades, by even the most conservative estimate,
 - over 65 research studies,
 - involving over 2,500 NDErs.

Scholarly Articles Addressing NDEs by Publication Dates: 1889-2005



Top Scholarly Publication Venues Ranked by Number of Articles Addressing NDEs through 2005.

• The clear leader: *Anabiosis/Journal of Near-Death Studies*, with nearly 15 times the number of articles than the next highest periodical.

- Of the non-JNDS journals,
- 7 in medicine,
- 6 in parapsychology,
- 5 in psychology,
- 4 in thanatology,
- 3 in religion.

Rank	Number of Articles	Most Recent Publication Year	Periodical
1	306	2005	<i>Anabiosis (1981-47)/Journal of Near-Death Studies (1987-2001)</i>
2	22	2001	<i>Journal of the American Society for Physical Research</i>
		1999	<i>Osage</i>
4	19	2001	<i>Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease</i>
5	12	1984	<i>Theta</i>
6	11	1989	<i>Parapsychology Review</i>
7	10	2001	<i>Lancet</i>
8	9	1993	<i>Journal of Religion and Health</i>
9	8	1993	<i>Journal of Transpersonal Psychology</i>
10	7	2005	<i>Death Studies</i>
	7	2005	<i>Journal of Humanistic Psychology</i>
	7	2001	<i>Journal of Parapsychology</i>
13	4	1989	<i>Journal of the American Medical Association</i>
14	5	1994	<i>American Journal of Nursing</i>
	5	1984	<i>Death Education</i>
	5	1982	<i>Seneca</i>
	5	1984	<i>Journal of Religion and Psychological Research</i>
	5	2001	<i>Journal of the Society for Physical Research</i>
	5	1993	<i>Psychiatry</i>
20	4	1987	<i>American Journal of Diseases of Children</i>
	4	1985	<i>American Journal of Psychiatry</i>
	4	1981	<i>American Psychologist</i>
	4	2005	<i>Christian Parapsychologist</i>
	4	1984	<i>Contemporary Psychology</i>
	4	1989	<i>In Views</i>

Scholarly Publications by Sole or First Author

- Because sheer number and recency of a scholar's publications do not assess quality or impact on the field, they are only a crude indicator of who are the leading past and present figures in the field of near-death studies.

Quantity Rank	Number of articles	Author	Most Recent Article	Quantity Rank
1	37	Greyson, Bruce	2005	1
2	25	Ping, Kenneth	1987	11
3	16	Lundahl, Craig	2001	7
4	14	Hayes, Russell	1989	20
	14	Serdobily, William	1996	14
6	11	Sibson, Michael	2005	1
7	10	Bodner, Carl	1995	15
	10	Kalichman, Alan	1994	17
9	9	Blackmore, Susan	1998	10
	9	Crossen, F. Gordon	2003	6
	9	Crossen, Michael	2001	7
	9	Nidhan, Justice	2005	1
13	8	Morris, Morvin	1997	11
	8	Stevenson, Ian	1995	15
15	7	Rago, D. Scott	1984	20
16	6	Jensen, Karl	2006	9
	6	Tevakian, Stuart	1997	11
18	5	Gabard, Glen	1991	19
	5	Chitt, John	2005	1
	5	Hydov, James, H.	1919	22
	5	Irwin, Harvey	1993	18
	5	Winn-Lewis, John	2005	1

Other interesting observations from the Index ...

- Number of articles addressing each of the 135 NDE-related topics used in the content analysis

- Most frequently addressed topics:
 - "methodology in NDE research."
 - "characteristics of NDEs—emotions—pleasurable."
 - "characteristics of NDEs—autoscopy, out-of-body,"
 - "characteristics of NDEs—light, mystical," and
 - "altered states and NDEs."
- The actual amount of research published so far has barely scratched the surface of what, hopefully someday, will be a much more comprehensive picture of the NDE.



Other interesting observation from the Index ...

Least frequently addressed topic—with only one citation listed—is "humor and NDEs."

- At least several of the least addressed topics indicate areas sorely in need of further research:

- "religion and NDEs—Indigenous cultures" and "—Judaism" with six citations each.
- "characteristics of NDEs—psychic abilities" with four,
- "circumstances of NDEs—combat related" with four, and
- "religion and NDEs—Islam" with only two.



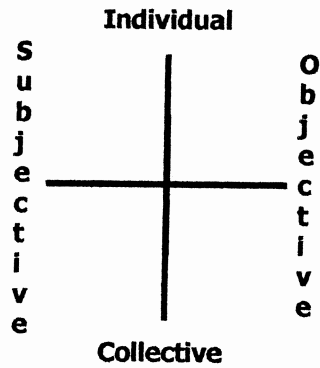
Controversy in the Field of Near-Death Studies

Adapted from Ken Wilber's (2000), Integral "theory of everything"

• Interplay between two fundamental dichotomies:

-the Individual and the collective

-the subjective/interior and the objective/exterior



Controversy in the Field of Near-Death Studies

Individual Subjective:
Experienced inside an individual.
- Individual report of one's NDE.

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Individual Objective:
Observed from outside of an individual.
- physiological monitoring during NDE
- questionnaires, etc.

Controversy in the Field of Near-Death Studies

Individual Subjective:
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Individual Objective:
Observed from outside an individual.
- physiological monitoring during NDE
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Collective Objective:
The societal/systemic context:
social, technological, etc. systems.
- Resuscitation & other medical technologies
- Political system
- Academic/scholarly system (research funding)
- Religious system


Controversy in the Field of Near-Death Studies

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<p>Collective Subjective: The cultural context: the shared worldview/meanings of a group of people.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The American public's pre-dominant belief in the afterlife - The Western scientific worldview of empirical investigation 	<p>Collective Objective: The societal/systemic context: social, technological, etc. systems.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Resuscitation & other medical technologies - Political system - Academic/scholarly system (research funding) - Religious system

Controversy in the Field of Near-Death Studies

Controversy in the field of near-death studies can be understood as occurring both within and between these quadrants, particularly when one aspect claims dominance over, or total exclusion of, another.


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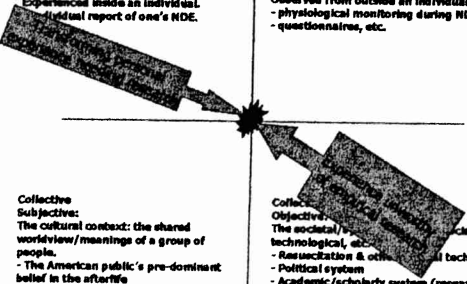
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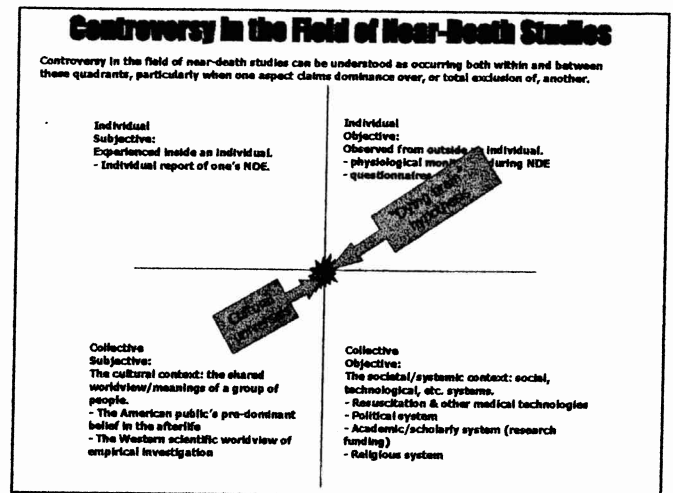
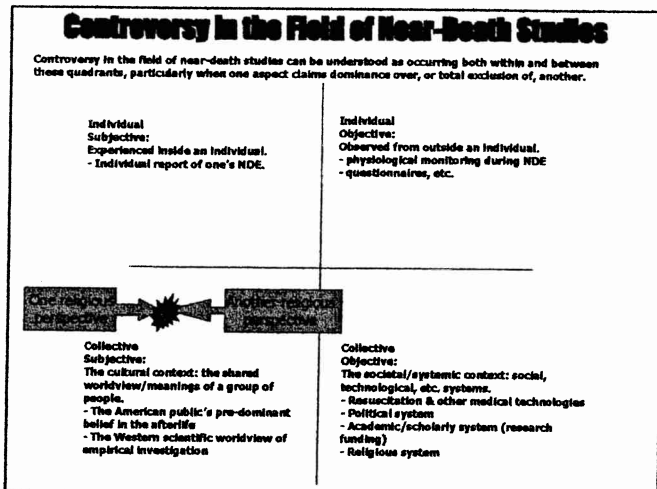


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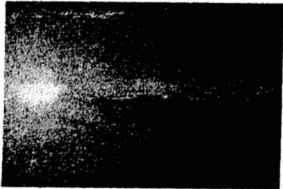




Controversy in the Field of Near-Death Studies

- The potential for controversy around NDEs is further heightened when Wilber's developmental perspective is taken into account.
- He has compiled a dizzying array of information—
 - ancient and modern,
 - Eastern and Western,
 - secular and spiritual—
 to support his contention that every individual, society, and culture potentially moves through a developmental sequence that he has broadly categorized as

prepersonal, personal, and transpersonal.



Controversy in the Field of Near-Death Studies

- Wilber has further contended that anyone can have at least a transitory experience of any state of consciousness...
- For example, theoretically, anyone is capable of having the transpersonal experience—transcending the usual personal limitations of space and/or time—of an NDE.

But how the NDE will be interpreted—by both the experient and others who hear about it—depends mightily on the developmental level at which the interpreter is primarily operating.

- One person might interpret it as an indication of being singled out by a blessing or punishing God;
- Another as a fascinating glimpse affording a broader understanding of the nature of human consciousness, if not cosmic Mind.

The potential for controversy is hopefully clear.

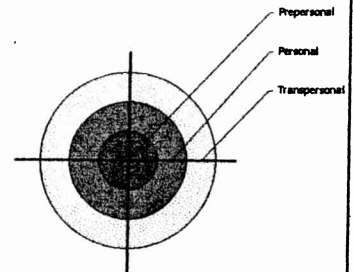
Controversy in the Field of Near-Death Studies

The history of the field of near-death studies might be conceptualized as an attempt to resolve the various controversies that the experience has so richly spawned.



Controversy in the Field of Near-Death Studies

From an Integral perspective, however, the goal of inquiry and discourse is not necessarily always to find one hypothesis or perspective right and another wrong but, rather, to discover how each of the four quadrants helps to inform a better understanding of NDEs—as Wilber has said,



To hold NDEs in an all-quadrant, all-level, Integral embrace.

Ethical Implications of the Field of Near-Death Studies for Healthcare Providers

- Whatever the ultimate outcome regarding these various controversies, some aspects of the NDE have achieved the status of fact:

- that people have these experiences
- that many such people find the experience itself, as well as its aftermath, to be profound
- that this profoundness makes many NDErs psychologically, socially, spiritually, and/or physically vulnerable.

- This vulnerability points to ethical imperatives on the part of NDErs' healthcare providers.



Ethical Implications of the Field of Near-Death Studies for Healthcare Providers

- In search of ethical principles common to the various medical, mental, and spiritual healthcare providers, we reviewed the ethical codes of:
 - American Medical Association
 - American Nurses Association
 - International Council of Nurses
 - American Psychiatric Association
 - American Psychological Association
 - American Counseling Association
 - National Board for Certified Counselors
 - National Association of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Counselors
 - American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists
 - National Association of Social Workers
 - American Association of Pastoral Counselors
 - The Common Code of Ethics for Chaplains, Pastoral Counselors, Pastoral Educators and Students

We found explicit or implicit reference to several principles...

Ethical Implications of the Field of Near-Death Studies for Healthcare Providers

Important ethical principles:

- nonmaleficence—to practice in a way that does no harm;
- beneficence—to practice in a way that does good, that contributes to the well-being of the patient or client;
- autonomy—to practice in a way that enables clients or patients to make informed, voluntary decisions whenever possible;
- respect for individuality and diversity—to practice in a way that honors the uniqueness of each individual and their social/cultural context;
- competence—to practice in a way that reflects the current knowledge base about medical, mental, and/or spiritual well-being.



Ethical Implications of the Field of Near-Death Studies for Healthcare Providers

These principles apply to the way healthcare professionals respond to NDEs.

Indeed, NDErs collectively might be considered a diverse population,

and at least some NDErs have been physically, psychologically, socially, and/or spiritually at-risk.



Ethical Implications of the Field of Near-Death Studies for Healthcare Providers

We know of cases involving unethical or ethically questionable action on the part of their healthcare providers:

- A patient/client being diagnosed with a mental disorder on the basis of her NDE alone
- A patient being medicated with a tranquilizer in response to his post-surgery report of an NDE
- A parishioner discounted or ostracized as grandiose and heretical for describing his NDE



Ethical Implications of the Field of Near-Death Studies for Healthcare Providers

We also know of cases involving ethical action:

- A counselor without expertise in NDEs who, presented with a client in whose history an NDE had played an important role, consulted with a counselor who did have such expertise.
- A nurse who invites patients both before and after surgery to discuss with her any experience surrounding their surgery that they wished to—no matter how unusual the experience.
- A rabbi who listened with interest and empathy to a member of his synagogue as that member described an NDE, who inquired into the meaning of the experience for the NDEr, and who affirmed the subjective reality of—and inherent mystery in—the experience.



Conclusion

In the next four days,
conference presenters will,
collectively,

- Summarize the current knowledge base regarding NDEs
- Discuss

- The ethical implications arising from that knowledge,
- The practical applications of that knowledge, and
- Future research directions to enhance that knowledge.

We believe that this conference will, itself, constitute a historic event in the field of near-death studies.



Conclusion

Along the way, we expect that you
won't be bored...

...and we certainly hope that you
won't be bored to *near-death*...

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"I was floating in a tunnel toward a very bright light
and then a voice told me I had to go back and
finish listening to the presentation."

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