Letters to the Editor
Cardiac Arrest and Near-Death Experiences

To the Editor:
The article by G. M. Woerlee on cardiac arrest and near-death experiences (NDEs) in the Summer 2004 issue of the Journal was rather disappointing in that it apparently did not even consider the excellent research by cardiologist Michael Sabom, one of the founders of the International Association for Near-Death Studies. Sabom conducted a major study on autoscopic NDEs, his own term for self-viewing of the physical body from an apparent location outside of the body. The results were published in his book *Recollections of Death: A Medical Investigation* (Sabom, 1982). Woerlee himself is an anesthesiologist and not a cardiologist.

In his first book, Sabom, from his experience as a cardiologist, was able to determine that six NDErs who said that they observed their resuscitation while allegedly outside their body were able to describe almost unerringly the cardiac resuscitation procedure that had been performed on them. Many of the descriptions were of visual rather than auditory phenomena. A larger selection of patients who did not claim an autoscopic NDE acted as controls, and they made numerous errors in describing the procedures being performed on them. Sabom's research appears very thorough and grounded in empirical evidence, in contrast to Woerlee's speculation that descriptions of medical procedures could be reconstructed by the mind from unconfirmed auditory input during periods of semiconsciousness while undergoing the cardiac resuscitation procedure.

In Sabom's second book, *Light and Death* (Sabom, 1998), he discussed a woman named Pam Reynolds who had an NDE and later described what was being done to her while her body was drained of blood in preparation for removal of a brain aneurysm. During that time, her eyes were taped shut and speakers were fitted in her ears to document by evoked potential recordings that auditory stimuli were not getting to her brain. Her NDE did begin before the blood was drained, but her body temperature was below 650 F.
Woerlee's discussion of levels of oxygen required for consciousness made his article appear scientific, whereas it was really conjecture unsupported by more thorough research such as Sabom's study. I do thank Woerlee for recognizing that NDEs can have profound changes in people's lives, but I believe the evidence supports the conclusion that the descriptions by NDErs are not the result of sensory input to the physical body.

References

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