

Near-Death Experiences:

Where Does Consciousness Go in a Clinically Dead Person? "We Are More Than Matter"

Fourteen hospitals, including Clínic de Barcelona and Ramón y Cajal in Madrid, are collaborating on a study that will track 344 patients over eight years who have experienced this phenomenon.



There are patients who report having had near-death experiences after a cardiorespiratory arrest and without brain function. Getty Images



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Barcelona

08/02/2025 06:00 Updated at 08/02/2025 07:43

"Consciousness is the presence of God in man," said Victor Hugo. Putting aside the religious aspect, this idea—which seems to separate consciousness from any material origin, such as the brain—could be endorsed by Dr. Luján Comas.

This specialist in anesthesiology and resuscitation, with more than 30 years of experience at Vall d'Hebron Hospital in Barcelona, is leading a study involving 14 hospitals, including Clínic de Barcelona, Bellvitge Hospital, and Ramón y Cajal Hospital in Madrid. The study

aims to determine what happens to the consciousness of people who have been clinically dead and, after resuscitation, have come back to life. Some of them report that, upon returning, they perceived the entire process of their resuscitation even while being unconscious. How is this possible? That is the question Dr. Comas seeks to answer.

“The research [named Project Light and driven by the Icloby Foundation] aims to prove that we are more than just matter,” Comas explains to *La Vanguardia*. *“We have a materialistic concept of existence—that is, when the brain stops, everything is over, and there is nothing beyond that. But it seems that near-death experiences (NDEs) recorded in hospitals—where there is a confirmed diagnosis of death requiring resuscitation—suggest otherwise,”* she adds.

“The research aims to prove that we are more than just matter.”

Luján Comas

Medical Specialist in Anesthesiology and Resuscitation

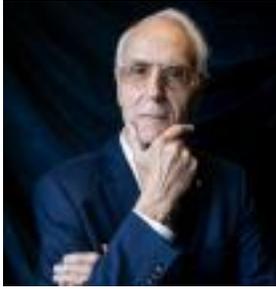
In this regard, she points out that a significant percentage of people report that during the few minutes when resuscitation was being attempted and their brain was nonfunctional (flat EEG), they experienced “a more heightened consciousness than when they were awake.” And not only that—they were able to accurately describe everything that happened around them.

But how is this possible if they had no brain function? *“This reality does not fit within the parameters that we, as doctors, were taught in medical school,”* Comas states. This is why another explanation is needed.

Today, she emphasizes, science does not yet know what happens to consciousness when a person is clinically dead following a cardiorespiratory arrest. *“But there are many studies that point to the existence of a non-local consciousness,”* she warns.

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This concept aligns with the supraconsciousness described by Dr. Manuel Sans Segarra—former head of the General and Digestive Surgery Department at Bellvitge Hospital—in his book *The Supraconsciousness Exists: Life After Life*. “It can be called *supraconsciousness, quantum field, soul, quantum vacuum...*” reflects Comas.

This researcher suspects that the widely accepted axiom—that consciousness is local and merely a byproduct of the brain—does not align with reality. “*We are studying cases of patients in vegetative states, in comas, where there is no brain function, yet consciousness appears to be present, simply unable to manifest,*” she explains. “*And this points to the concept of non-local consciousness, where the brain would function like an antenna, a receiver, an interface between that supraconsciousness and the local consciousness—the one tied to the brain.*”

Hospitals Participating in the Study

As of December 2024

Hospital	City	Country
Hospital Clínic	Barcelona	Spain
Hospital Universitario de Bellvitge	Barcelona	Spain
Hospital Universitario Mutua Terrassa	Barcelona	Spain
Hospital Vithas La Milagrosa	Madrid	Spain
Hospital Vithas Aravaca	Madrid	Spain
Hospital Universitario de Móstoles	Madrid	Spain
Hospital Universitario Ramón y Cajal	Madrid	Spain
Hospital Universitario A Coruña (CHUAC)	A Coruña	Spain
Hospital Vithas Xanit Internacional	Benalmádena	Spain
Hospital Quirón	Málaga	Spain
Hospital Universitario de Albacete	Albacete	Spain

Hospital	City	Country
Hospital Universitario Río Ortega	Valladolid	Spain
Clínica Central Villa Regina	Río Negro	Argentina
Hospital San José	Bogotá	Colombia

Source: Fundación Icloby

This perspective shatters conventional frameworks, *“but the fact that it breaks them does not mean it isn’t happening,”* Comas emphasizes. *“It is happening, and we need to find out why. There must be an explanation.”*

One thing is clear, she stresses: NDEs (near-death experiences) are not hallucinations, *“a phenomenon that cannot occur unless the brain is active.”* She also points out that hallucinations never lead to profound life changes towards a more spiritual outlook—*“which does not necessarily mean religious”*—and those who experience them tend to avoid discussing them because they leave them feeling unsettled.

“The fact that this reality disrupts our entire worldview does not mean it does not exist.”

— Luján Comas

Medical Specialist in Anesthesiology and Resuscitation

NDEs, on the other hand, profoundly transform people’s lives. *“After such an experience, people change their lifestyle. That is, a phenomenon that lasts, at most, two minutes, leads them to make significant transformations,”* says Comas. *“And this change doesn’t have to be immediate—it has been observed that it can take years. More than 70% of these individuals separate from their partners. They feel more drawn to the spiritual side of the world rather than the material. They seek greater connection with nature, animals, and other human beings. Many even change careers.”*

The Project Light Study

Project Light consists of three phases and will track each of the 344 participating patients over an eight-year period. Some hospitals have already completed the first phase, which

is activated when a patient—who will later become part of the study—experiences an NDE.

“This is a prospective study, like any clinical trial, and includes a control group,” explains Comas. “We are not only studying people who have had an NDE but also a group of patients who suffered a cardiorespiratory arrest without reporting an NDE.”



Some patients do not dare to talk about their near-death experiences (NDEs). *Getty Images*

After cardiac arrest and resuscitation, all clinical data is collected through a protocol that has been established and validated by the ethics and research committees of each participating hospital. In the second year, participants complete several scientific questionnaires to assess the changes in their lives following the experience. Then, after eight years, they are surveyed again.

"Many do not share their NDE in the first year, but they do in the second or even after eight years," says Comas. Why? "They are afraid of being sent to a psychiatrist, given medication... and this has happened. Sometimes, their families advise them not to talk about it because of potential consequences."

344 Patients and an Eight-Year Follow-Up

To validate that a person has had an NDE, they must meet at least seven of the 16 criteria on the Greyson Scale, created by Dr. Bruce Greyson, a scientific advisor to the study and one of the pioneers in this field of research.

The study's goal of tracking 344 patients is not random—it is designed to compare findings with a 2001 study by cardiologist Pim Van Lommel, which also included 344 participants and was published in *The Lancet*.

"Possibly, all people who are near death have these experiences."

— **Luján Comas**

Medical Specialist in Anesthesiology and Resuscitation

Only 18% of the participants in Van Lommel's study reported having an NDE. *"We don't know why only that group experienced it. Across all studies conducted so far, the percentage ranges from 6% to 25%,"* explains Comas.

However, she has a theory: *"It has been scientifically proven that we all dream, yet only a small percentage of people remember their dreams. Something similar might be happening with NDEs, but we need to prove it. Possibly, all people who are close to death have these experiences."*

"Consciousness is not local; it goes beyond time and space and is eternal."

— **Pim Van Lommel**

Cardiologist and Researcher

Van Lommel explains that in his study, neither the duration of cardiac arrest (2 or 8 minutes), the period of unconsciousness (5 minutes or three weeks in a coma), the need

for intubation, nor the complexity of resuscitation had any influence on the likelihood of experiencing an NDE. In other words, the severity of oxygen deprivation in the brain (anoxia) appeared to be irrelevant.

As a scientific advisor to *Project Light*, Van Lommel hopes that Comas' study—along with other ongoing research—will confirm his findings: *“The brain does not produce consciousness; rather, it functions as an interface for experiencing it. Consciousness is not local, it goes beyond time and space, and it is eternal, with no beginning or end.”*

A Life-Changing NDE

Many individuals have shared remarkable stories of their near-death experiences. One of the most astonishing cases for Dr. Comas is that of Eben Alexander, a neurosurgeon and former professor at Harvard Medical School for 15 years, who is also a scientific advisor for *Project Light*.

Alexander did not believe in NDEs until he had his own in 2008, when a bacterial infection severely damaged his brain, leaving him in a coma. After a week on life support, doctors told his wife they would have to disconnect him, as there was no sign of improvement—in fact, his condition had worsened, and his entire cognitive brain function was destroyed. If he were to wake up, he would be in a critical state.

His son, overhearing this conversation, went to his father's room and spoke to him, asking him not to leave. Despite being in a coma, Alexander woke up. His recovery was extraordinary, and he described incredible experiences he had while unconscious.

He recounted meeting a 19-year-old girl, who acted as his guide and told him he had to return—his time had not yet come. He described her in detail, but he had no idea who she was.

There was a remarkable twist to his story: Alexander was adopted. His biological parents had given him up because they were too young, but later, they married and had three children—a fact he had never known.

Four months after his coma, Alexander received a photo of one of his three biological siblings—the eldest sister, Betsy. She was the same girl who had guided him during his coma. She had passed away at age 19, two years before his illness.