

# World's largest study of near-death experiences to start

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Courtesy University of Southampton and [World Science](#) staff

The University of Southampton, U.K. announced it is launching this week the world's largest-ever study on whether people have thoughts for a time while they are clinically "dead."

The AWARE (AWAreness during REsuscitation) study is to be launched by the Human Consciousness Project at the university, an international collaboration of scientists and physicians who have joined forces to study the human brain, consciousness and clinical death.

The study is led by Sam Parnia, an expert in consciousness during clinical death at Weill Cornell Medical Center in New York, with University of Southampton researchers. Following an 18-month pilot phase at some U.K. hospitals, the study is now being expanded to include other centres within the U.K., mainland Europe and North America, Parnia said.

"Contrary to popular perception," Parnia said, "death is not a specific moment. It is a process that begins when the heart stops beating, the lungs stop working and the brain ceases functioning—a medical condition termed cardiac arrest, which from a biological viewpoint is synonymous with clinical death.

"During a cardiac arrest, all three criteria of death are present. There then follows a period of time, which may last from a few seconds to an hour or more, in which emergency medical efforts may succeed in restarting the heart and reversing the dying process. What people experience during this period of cardiac arrest provides a unique window of understanding into what we are all likely to experience during the dying process."

Some studies have found that 10-20 per cent of people who go through cardiac arrest and clinical death report lucid, well structured thought processes, reasoning, memories and sometimes detailed recall of events during their encounter with death, Parnia said.

During the AWARE study, doctors will use sophisticated technology to study the brain and consciousness during cardiac arrest. At the same time, they will test the validity of out of body experiences and claims of being able to "see" and "hear" during cardiac arrest.