

Teaching rescuers how to treat a drowning swimmer with a near-death experience: A review

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Introduction

Swimmers who became drowning casualties have sometimes reported near-death experiences (NDEs).

Aims/Objectives

To enhance water safety professional's competence regarding the phenomenon of NDE, to identify and suggest NDE-sensitive teaching and practical recommendations both during and after a drowning resuscitation.

Method

The key words drown, near-death experience, CPR, and teaching were used in the undertaken literature review that used sources that are routinely available in academic libraries and electronic databases (e.g. Medline, Sport Discuss, PsychINFO and PubMed). The selection process was based on the following criteria; (a) literature published in USA where NDEs are well researched, and (b) literature covering recommendations about the features of NDE and the resuscitation of swimmers who became drowning victims.

Results

A number of coping strategies are suggested that enable resuscitation and first aid teachers, professional rescuers and lifeguards to provide more quality services to individuals with NDE after a drowning episode. We provide recommendations for the way that resuscitation should be taught and performed, assuming that the casualty might be having an NDE, and for providing effective aftercare to an unconscious drowning casualty, a conscious casualty that cannot verbalize, and the recovered drowning casualty who had an NDE.

Conclusions

Given that about 10–30% of successfully resuscitated drowning casualties have had NDEs, water safety teachers and rescuers can be best equipped to provide the highest quality care to future resuscitants if they are armed with NDE-related knowledge and skills. Also the great majority of reported NDEs suggest a profoundly pleasurable existence beyond physical death, one to which nearly all NDEs look forward to returning when their life's work has been completed. Thus, when water safety professionals inevitably encountered victims who could not be saved, they might very well be comforted to know that any ongoing conscious experience on the part of the victim was most likely of a profoundly pleasurable nature.

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