

Exploring frontiers of the mind-brain relationship

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Abstrak

The attitude towards death and dying depends on the culture. In prehistoric times grave artifacts suggest a belief in the continuation of life. This belief in an afterlife has continued through different cultures and societies to the present day. The fear of death seems to have grown in parallel with those religions which have promised judgment at the time of death. In our modern Western secular society death is regarded as a medical failure, the rituals which used to attend it have largely been abandoned, and life is prolonged so that death has lost all dignity. It is now beginning to be recognised that dying may not be a simple switching off, but a process leading to death and the gradual dissolution of consciousness. This dissolution seems to involve experiences for the dying which are spiritual and important for them. A number of these phenomena raise the possibility that consciousness may not be limited to the brain, but extend beyond it. Fortunately, palliative care is now taught in medical schools, and treatment of the dying is now recognised to be as important as treatment for the living. This article looks at the history of death, the significance of the dying process for consciousness research, and the education needed for carers of the dying.