What Happens When We Die: World’s Largest Scientific Study To Be Launched At U.N. Symposium On Human Consciousness

**WHAT:** International symposium featuring leading experts on the study of consciousness at Beyond the Mind-Body Problem: New Paradigms in the Science of Consciousness. The Human Consciousness Project℠ will launch AWARE, the world’s largest U.S.-European scientific study on the relationship between mind and brain during clinical death. The results may not only revolutionize medical care of critically ill patients and the scientific study of the mind and brain, but also bear profound universal implications for our understanding of death and the mystery of what happens when we die.

**WHEN:** Thursday, September 11, 2008 from 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.

**WHERE:** UNITED NATIONS, Trusteeship Council Chamber, New York, NY

**WHO:** Co-sponsored by the Nour Foundation, nonprofit and non-governmental organization with consultative status to the U.N., the Université de Montréal, and the NGO Section of the U.N. Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

Mario Beauregard, Ph.D. (Université de Montréal); Elie During, Ph.D. (University of Paris X); Ebrahim Elahi, M.D., FACS (Mount Sinai School of Medicine); Bruce Greyson, M.D. (University of Virginia); Andrew Newberg, M.D. (University of Pennsylvania); Sam Parnia, M.D., Ph.D. (University of Southampton, Weill Cornell Medical Center); Christina M. Puchalski, M.D., FACP (George Washington University); Jeffrey M. Schwartz, M.D. (University of California Los Angeles); Henry P. Stapp, Ph.D. (University of California Berkley); Esther M. Sternberg, M.D. (National Institute of Mental Health, NIH).

**WHY:** To explore how new paradigms in neuroscience are altering our understanding of the self and the workings of the human mind; to formally launch AWARE (AWAREness during RESuscitation) and The Human Consciousness Project℠—a multidisciplinary collaboration of international scientists and physicians who have joined forces to research the nature of consciousness and its relationship with the brain. Led by Dr. Sam Parnia of the University of Southampton/Weill Cornell Medical Center, The Human Consciousness Project℠ will carry out the world’s first and largest-ever study on the relationship between mind and brain during clinical death at major medical centers across the United States and Europe. For information and registration, visit www.mindbodysymposium.com.
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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World’s Largest Scientific Study on Mind-Brain
May Finally Unravel Mystery Of What Happens When We Die

A major new international study to be launched by a consortium of U.S. and European medical centers may finally reveal the answer to the age-old mystery of what happens when we die, as well as the nature of the human mind and its relation with the brain—two of the most perplexing questions that have baffled humankind for millennia.

The AWARE (AWAreness during REsuscitation) study is the first launched by The Human Consciousness Project, a multidisciplinary collaboration of international scientists and physicians who have joined forces to study the relationship between mind and brain during clinical death.

The study is led by Dr. Sam Parnia, a world-renowned expert on the study of the human mind and consciousness during clinical death, and is being conducted in collaboration with more than 25 major medical centers in the United States and Europe.

Although the study of death has traditionally been considered a subject for theology or philosophy, recent advances in medicine have finally enabled a scientific approach to understanding the ultimate mystery facing humankind. “Contrary to popular perception,” Dr. Parnia explains, “death is not a specific moment. It is actually 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. Subsequently, there is a period of time, ranging from a few seconds to an hour or longer, 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.”

A number of recent scientific studies carried out by independent researchers have demonstrated that 10-20 percent 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.

“The remarkable point about these experiences,” according to Dr. Parnia, “is that while studies of the brain during cardiac arrest have consistently shown that there is no measurable brain activity, these subjects have reported detailed perceptions that indicate the contrary—namely, a high level of consciousness in the absence of detectable brain activity. If we can objectively verify these claims, the results would bear profound implications not only for the scientific community, but for the way in which we understand and relate to life and death as a society.”

Using sophisticated technology to study the brain and consciousness during cardiac arrest, doctors will also be testing the validity of so-called out of body experiences and claims of being able to see and hear during cardiac arrest by using hidden images that can only be seen from specific vantage points in the hospital rooms.
The AWARE study will be complemented by the BRAIN-1 (Brain Resuscitation Advancement International Network - 1) study, which will conduct a variety of physiological tests in cardiac arrest patients as well as cerebral monitoring techniques that aim to identify methods to improve the medical and psychological care of patients who have undergone cardiac arrest. In particular, both studies will be using the INVOS® Cerebral Oximeter provided by Somanetics, an FDA-cleared noninvasive patient monitor that provides an indication of brain oxygen levels and circulation of blood to the brain.

Following a successful 18-month pilot phase at select hospitals in the UK, these studies have now been expanded to include many more centers in the UK, Europe, and North America. Researchers ultimately aim to recruit 1,500 cardiac arrest survivors.

These are the first comprehensive studies systematically examining the mind, brain, and consciousness during cardiac arrest and their wider scientific and social implications. The studies are being funded by the UK Resuscitation Council, the Horizon Research Foundation, and the Nour Foundation in the United States.

Dr. Parnia will formally announce the launch of the Human Consciousness Project and its AWARE study at an international symposium at the United Nations on September 11. “Beyond the Mind-Body Problem: New Paradigms in the Science of Consciousness” is being sponsored by the Nour Foundation the NGO Section of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, and the Université de Montréal.

**About the Sponsors**

**The Nour Foundation: Unity Amid Plurality** is a public charitable and nongovernmental organization with consultative status to the United Nations. Conceived in 1985, the Foundation explores the core principles and values underlying various disciplines and schools of thought through an integrative approach that seeks to promote greater understanding, unity, and tolerance among human beings worldwide.

**The NGO Section of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs** contributes to the creation of interface structures between the UN and private organizations at all levels, including academia, NGOs, business organizations, and philanthropic foundations.

**The Université de Montréal** is one of the top universities in the French-speaking world. Founded in 1878, the Université de Montréal constitutes the largest center of higher education and research in Québec and the second largest in Canada.

**Notes for editors:**

The Human Consciousness Project is a multidisciplinary U.S.-European collaboration of international scientists and physicians who have joined forced to research the nature of consciousness and the relationship between mind, brain, and consciousness during cardiac arrest at major medical centers across the United States, Canada, and Europe.

The current UK centers participating in the study include Southampton General, Hammersmith and Charing Cross, St Georges, Mayday, Ashford and St Peter’s, Morriston (Swansea), Royal Bournemouth, Lister Hospital (Stevenage), Northampton, and Salisbury hospitals. These will be joined by the Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford, Addenbrookes Hospital, Cambridge, Swindon Hospital, University Hospital Birmingham, James Paget Hospital and East Sussex Hospitals.

Collaborators in the U.S. include Indiana State University, the University of North Chicago, Drexel University, Brooklyn Medical Center, the University of Virginia, Wayne State University, and New York University; and in Europe the Vienna General Hospital in Austria.

The list of collaborators is current as of August 2008, but as with any study may change due to clinical circumstances.