

# 'Mind and brain seem to be separate' says professor

by SIMON FORSYTH



**Professor Peter Fenwick and NDE experimenter Heather Sloane answer questions from the audience. The lecture was held at The White Eagle Lodge in London.**

PROFESSOR PETER Fenwick, one of the world's leading researchers into near-death experiences (NDEs), has told an audience of his belief that NDEs seem to provide evidence which strongly suggests that the mind and brain are not the same.

Speaking at a lecture given at the London headquarters of The White Eagle Lodge, the professor spoke for over an hour about the phenomena which have been reported at the time of dying, prospective NDE studies and explanations for the phenomena of NDEs.

Professor Fenwick said:

"What I'd like to do is look at the whole process of dying. If near death experiences are really something about what happens at death then we must be able to get this reflected in some sense in the dying process itself. So if we start looking at the phenomena which occurs when people die we should begin to get a match with the near death experience, looking at it from different points of view.

"Then I want to look at prospective NDE studies - prospective means that you don't advertise in the papers for people who claim NDEs, you go somewhere where you know the experiences are likely to occur. and then, you find out from people who have them. You see the difference? Because although Heather said, and I know she's right because there is work to support it, that she remembers everything that happened during her NDE, you have to test that. It may be that in the telling of the experience it all changes. It normally doesn't, in fact, and there is some good data from France that shows it doesn't. But you still have to check it and show that it's true.

"Then I want to look at some explanatory frameworks that we can put

it in and then ask the question 'are brain and consciousness the same?'

"Let's look at the dying process itself. Stage 1 is what are called nearing death experiences. These include what are called 'take away visions' or death bed visions. These are visions of relatives and friends who have already passed over who have come to help you through the dying process. The second one is the experience of light in other worlds that the dying person has. The dying person experiences these worlds, and then come back and tell you about it.

"There are also what are called death bed coincidences. Now, we don't know if these are in fact coincidences or whether they are real. These are visits to friends or relatives at the time of death. In other words you may be dying, your sister may be in Australia and she then has a visit from you at the time of your death.

"So, what sort of things do the dying say? This is a patient of mine who had a slow growing tumour. His wife was able to talk to me about the time she spent with him just before he died. This is what she said:

"'He was going unconscious when I looked at him. He was looking fixedly at something in front of him. A smile of recognition spread slowly over his face as if he was greeting someone. Then he relaxed peacefully and died'.

"Another example from a researcher called Erlendur Haraldsson. This is a 16 year old girl who starts the dying process and goes into a coma. Then, just before she dies she says:

"'I can't get up.' She opened her eyes. I raised her up a little. She said: 'I see him, I see him! I'm coming.' Then she died immediately afterwards with a radiant face, exalted and elated.

"I want you to see the relationship between the patient seemingly greeting somebody and then almost immediately afterwards, dying. It seems as if we have within us the capacity, if we aren't drugged completely, to choose the actual moment when we die. Quite often people seem to die and go with people at the time of death. Now, there isn't very much literature on this. You could read ten papers on it, and become a world expert on it!

"What happens at the time of dying? What do witnesses actually see? This was told to me by a GP in New Zealand. He was playing golf when another player had a heart attack. As he was going to help he saw what he described as a white form which seemed to rise and separate from the body. So here is the idea that something separates from the body at the time of death.

"The approaching death experiences are telling us something about the dying process and what consciousness is."



**Professor Peter Fenwick**

Speaking of his own research professor Fenwick said:

"We need now some theories about the causation of NDEs. Now, you can't say these are transcendent experiences because the people are unconsciousness. You can't say they are psychological because the brain isn't working. You can look at physiological models as to what state the brain is in, and if the brain function won't support the experience you have to argue that mind and brain are separate.

"So, let's look at the physiological state of the brain and body at the time of reported NDEs. No detectable cardiac output, no respiratory output - they certainly weren't breathing. Neither did they have any brain stem reflexes - in other words they was no activity whatsoever in the brain.

"The NDE experiencers say that they didn't have the experience before the heart attack occurred. We know that it couldn't have occurred during the recovery of consciousness because in such cases the mind is very confused and the reported experiences are very lucid and clear.

"So we are left with a real scientific problem. It looks as if what the NDE experiencers are saying is probably correct. Now, if that's true then you have to say some very fundamental things about brain and mind. That carries a huge cost and consequence for science. So research in this area has to be done properly. But it looks as if mind and brain - if the data is correct - are separate."