The Vegetative State, Evidence, and the Quest For Consciousness

When we see or visit people in a vegetative state we want to know how they feel, do they think or feel pain. Are they trapped inside a shell where they are lifeless on the outside but living within? Dr. Adrian Owen shows that clearly that vegetative is not brain dead.

The brain and technology weave together the promise that maybe in the future ways of communicating could be developed so those who are trapped in a body that no longer communicates can unlock the doors of the mind to build again the bridge between body and brain at least to some extent. In the video below Dr. Owen shows what a vegetative brain looks like.

2010 Prof Owen published research showing that nearly one in five vegetative patients he investigated were able to communicate using brain activity.

“Scott one of the vegetative like patients Owen and team communicated with has been able to show he has a conscious, thinking mind. We have scanned him several times and his pattern of brain activity shows he is clearly choosing to answer our questions. We believe he knows who and where he is.”

A Canadian patient, Steven Graham, was able to demonstrate that he had laid down new memories since his brain injury. Mr
Graham answers yes when asked whether his sister has a daughter. His niece was born after his car accident five years ago. Imagine being able to know without communicating that a child was born and to remember this. What must it be like to be in a nap from which there is no waking. Do they dream they are moving in sleep? I have always treated vegetative people as if they could hear and have feelings. I am glad in the light of this evidence I made this choice. In the video above you can see how a brain that cannot communicate looks like. The video below is communication with Steve