



Sudden Death and the Myth of CPR

Stefan Timmermans

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Sudden Death and the Myth of CPR is for anyone who has taken a CPR course or who believes the images from television dramas. It is also for families of victims and survivors of CPR. It will engage emergency personnel, others in the medical field, and anyone concerned with ethical issues of death and dying.

Anyone who has ever taken a CPR course has wondered, "What would happen if I actually had to use CPR?" In Western societies, the lifesaving power of resuscitation has the status of a revered cultural myth. It promises life in the face of sudden death, but the reality is that lives are rarely saved. Medical researchers estimate the survival rate for out-of-hospital CPR to be between 1 and 3 percent. *Sudden Death and the Myth of CPR* explores the history of this medical innovation and the promotion of its effectiveness.

The overuse of resuscitation, Timmermans explains, defines people's experience with sudden death, something he learned firsthand by following the practice of lifesaving from street corner to emergency room. He argues that very few people are successfully resuscitated without brain damage despite the promotion of CPR's effectiveness through powerful media images. In vivid accounts of the day-to-day practices of cardiopulmonary resuscitation in one of the only studies of sudden death, Timmermans records the astonishingly frank comments of emergency personnel. Doctors, nurses, social workers, and paramedics express emotions from cynicism about going through the futile motions to genuine concern for victims' family members.

If a person who was supposed to keep on living dies at the end of a resuscitative attempt, how socially meaningful is the dying? Timmermans asks tough questions and addresses the controversial ethical issues about the appropriateness of interfering with life and death. He suggests policy reform and the restoration of dignity to sudden death.

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