

## ‘Awakened’ vegetative man shows how viral stories raise false hopes

A man recently “[woke](#)” from a vegetative state, [crying again](#) after “[regaining consciousness](#),” creating a flurry of news coverage. Yet as exciting as this sounds, the case came with plenty of caveats. Many headlines rightly imply that the man was only minimally conscious, not much better than a vegetative state. He also died before the scientists published their paper. The truth is that you shouldn’t raise your hopes too high after single case studies.

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It’s great to feel optimistic about this kind of progress if you’re hoping to one day see patients awake from many-year comas. But this work was based on a [single case study](#) published in Current Biology. That’s not how science works. What if it was a fluke, or the patient woke up on their own, or something else the scientists did actually caused the patient’s eyes to open? As blogger Neuroskeptic pointed out to me in an email, “The raters are also not mentioned as being blinded i.e. I think they knew all about the vagus stimulation. ”

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Single cases like these are important and exciting. But we shouldn’t let the mask of a good story oversell what really happened. In this case, a man in a vegetative state began moving his eyes, and then died.

**The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion, and analysis. Read full, original post: [That Viral Story of an ‘Awakened’ Vegetative Patient Serves as a Cautionary Tale](#)**