

Oh, Delay

Written by nuncio
Thursday, 03 March 2011 09:30

Baby Ella Claxton was 'frozen' for 3 days in order to save her life, we were told in the [news headlines recently](#)

. It's an ideal popular-press headline, another opportunity for some mindless hack to make frequent use the word 'miracle'. But we are not, of course, really talking about miracles or freezing here but rather [therapeutic hypothermia](#)

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It's also misleading for the press to be talking about baby Ella having been 'stillborn'. She was, in reality, suffering from oxygen starvation which the doctors feared was causing ischemic brain injury. Putting her into a hypothermic state reduced her requirement for oxygen and, therefore, reduced the risk of brain damage.

This story, and others relating to the use of therapeutic hypothermia, strike a chord with me. I often struggle to explain the principles of cryonics to people who are unfamiliar with the subject. For some reason the thorny issue of death keeps getting in the way. But news stories about therapeutic cooling, no matter how inaccurately written, help to get across the importance of these techniques during life and, therefore, provide a 'contextual bridge' for getting to the subject of cooling after death.

To me the key principal in both cases is delay. The cooling of this oxygen-starved newborn provided a time delay during which doctors could assess and reduce the effects of [Hypoxic-Ischemic Encephalopathy](#)

. In the case of cryonics the cooling and eventual 'vitrification' of the deceased provides an indefinite time delay during which scientists can work towards the formulation of appropriate revival techniques.

I realise that there is a gaping void of feasibility and perceived credibility between therapeutic hypothermia and cryonics. The media wish to use words like 'dead' and 'stillborn' in connection with baby Ella because that is what gets a reaction: If she was 'dead' it appears 'miraculous' that she was 'brought back'. But, as we should have realised by now, the perceived boundaries between what constitutes life and what constitutes death can be fuzzy and mutable.

When all else has failed, where is the harm in cooling a body? It may just provide that precious

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gift of time required to find a means of revival. If nothing else it will delay the onset of decay and dissolution into the nothingness of non-life.

Why the rush?