

Lucidity Episodes in Severe Dementia and at End of Life: A Scoping Review

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1. Lucidity can occur in severe dementia and near end of life but remains poorly understood. 2. Common features include recognition, communication, memory recall, and emotional clarity 3. Episodes are most often observed by family caregivers and nursing staff. 4. Duration ranges from seconds to days and emotional impact varies. 5. Standardized definitions, research, and clinical guidance are needed.

INTRODUCTION

Episodes of unexpected lucidity, often termed terminal lucidity, paradoxical lucidity, or lucid episodes, have been reported in individuals with severe dementia and in those near the end of life. These events remain poorly understood and raise important clinical and ethical questions. The objective of this scoping review was to **map and synthesize the existing literature on lucid episodes in severe dementia and at end of life**. We aimed to identify the terminology and operational definitions used and to examine the perceived significance of these episodes and their implications for care.

METHODS

Figure 1. PRISMA-ScR flow diagram of the study selection process.

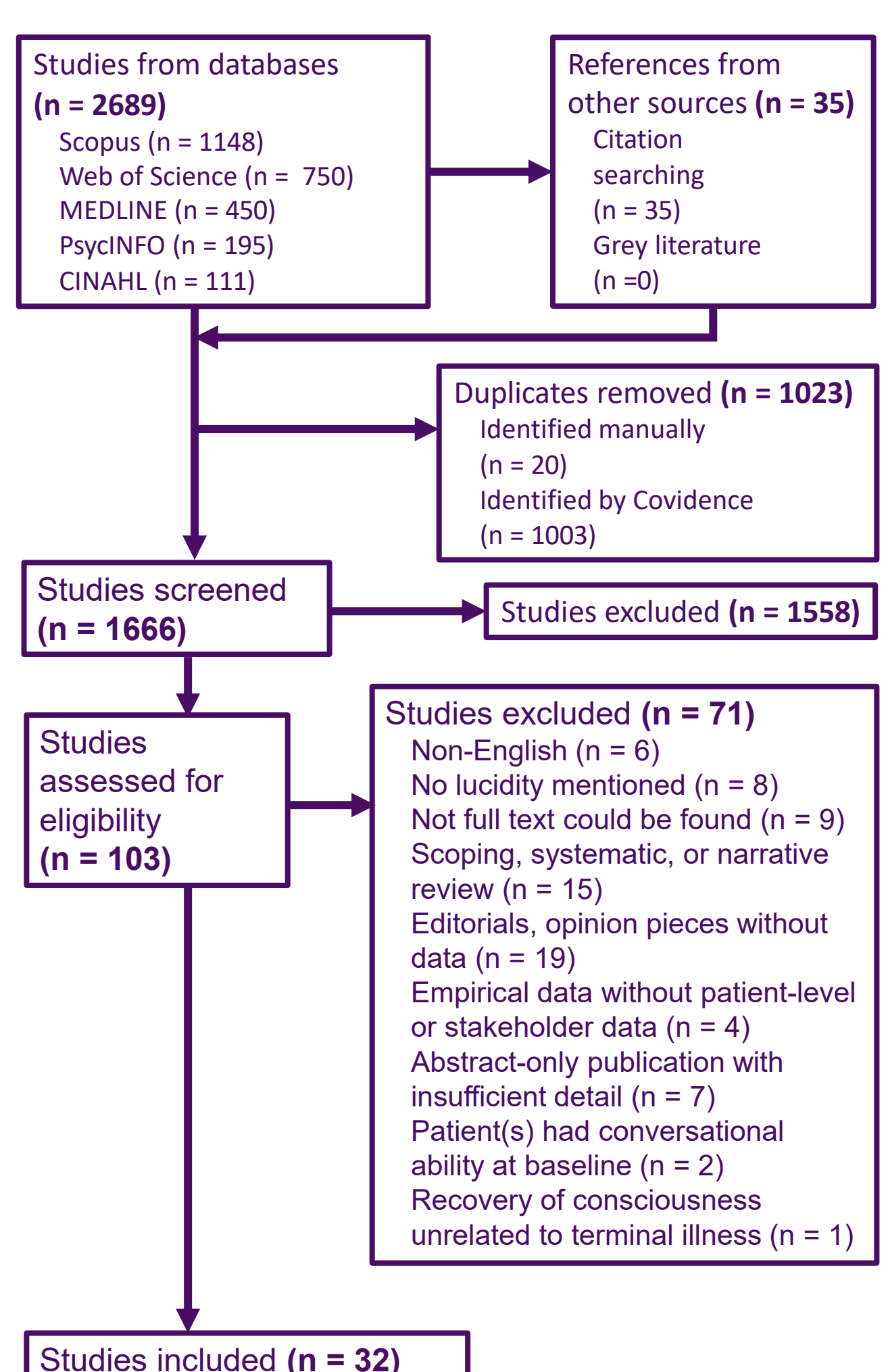


Figure 2. Terminology and population characteristics of included studies

Lead author	Year	Country	Term used
Dementia			
Batthyány	2021	Multiple (Europe & US)	Paradoxical lucidity
Benson	2023	United States	Episode of lucidity
Claxton-Oldfield	2025	Canada	Brief, unexpected return to mental clarity and memory shortly before dying
Coulson	2024	United States	Episode of lucidity
Gilmore-Bykovskiy	2023	United States	Episode of lucidity
Gilmore-Bykovskiy	2025	United States	Episode of lucidity
Griffin	2025	United States	Episode of lucidity
Griffin	2024	United States	Episode of lucidity
Griffin	2022	United States	Episode of lucidity
Karlawish	2024	United States	Episode of lucidity
Kim	2025	United States	Episode of lucidity
Ney	2021	United States	Paradoxical lucidity
Normann	2006	Sweden	Episode of lucidity
Normann	2005	Norway	Lucid moment
Normann	1998	Norway	Episode of lucidity
Post	2024	United States	Unexpected lucidity
Ramirez	2024	United States	Lucid event
Roehrs	2024	United States	Terminal lucidity
Suzuki	2022	Japan	Terminal lucidity
Teresi	2023	United States	Paradoxical lucidity
Non-Dementia			
Julião	2022	Portugal	Energy surge
Macleod	2009	New Zealand	Lightening up before death
Mutis	2025	France	Terminal lucidity
Nahm	2013	Germany	Terminal lucidity
Not reported			
Brayne	2008	United Kingdom	Lucid moment
Claxton-Oldfield	2018	Canada	Terminal lucidity
Claxton-Oldfield	2020	Canada	End of life phenomena
Claxton-Oldfield	2022	Canada	Terminal lucidity
Dalcolmo	2025	Portugal	Terminal lucidity
Kothe	2025	International	Terminal lucidity
Lim	2020	South Korea	Terminal lucidity
Dos Santos	2017	Brazil	End of life phenomena

RESULTS

Figure 3. Stakeholders identifying lucidity episodes across studies

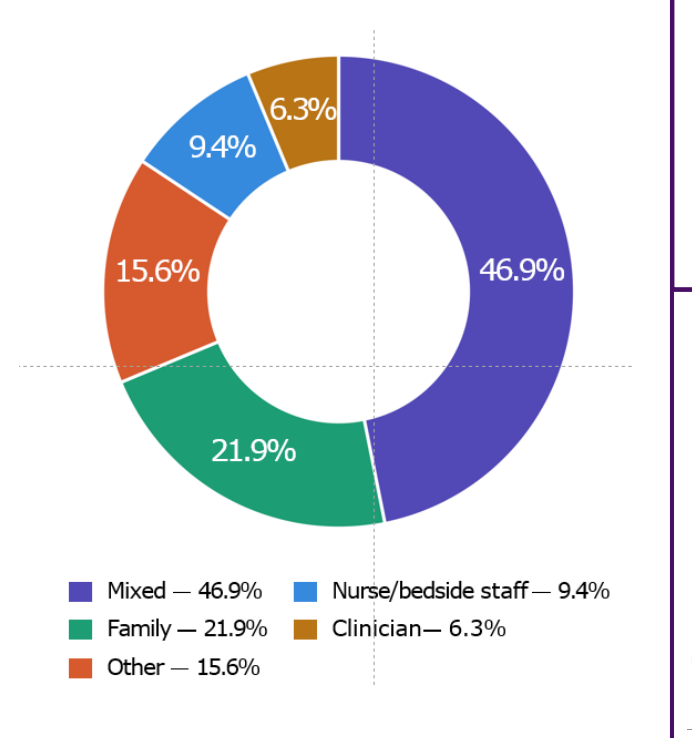


Figure 4. Frequency of lucid episodes N= 15/32 studies

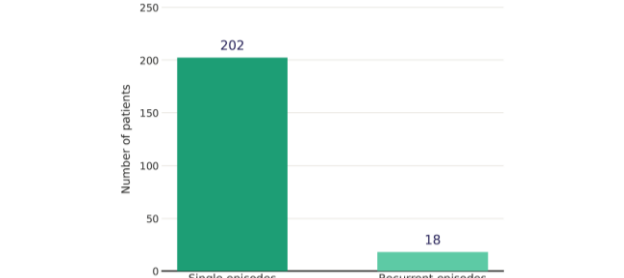


Figure 5. Stakeholder Interpretation N= 16/32 studies

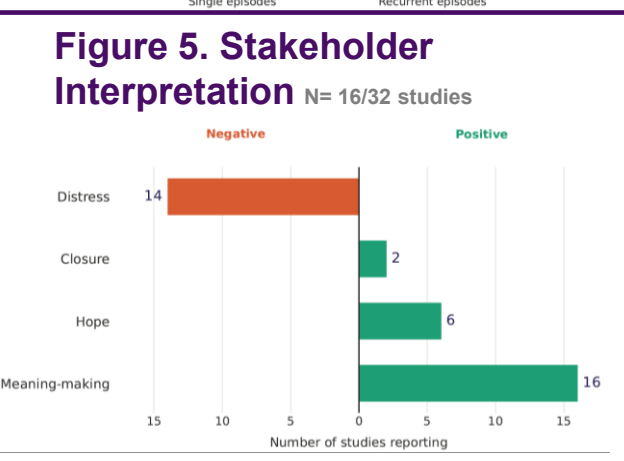


Figure 6. Timing of lucidity episodes relative to death

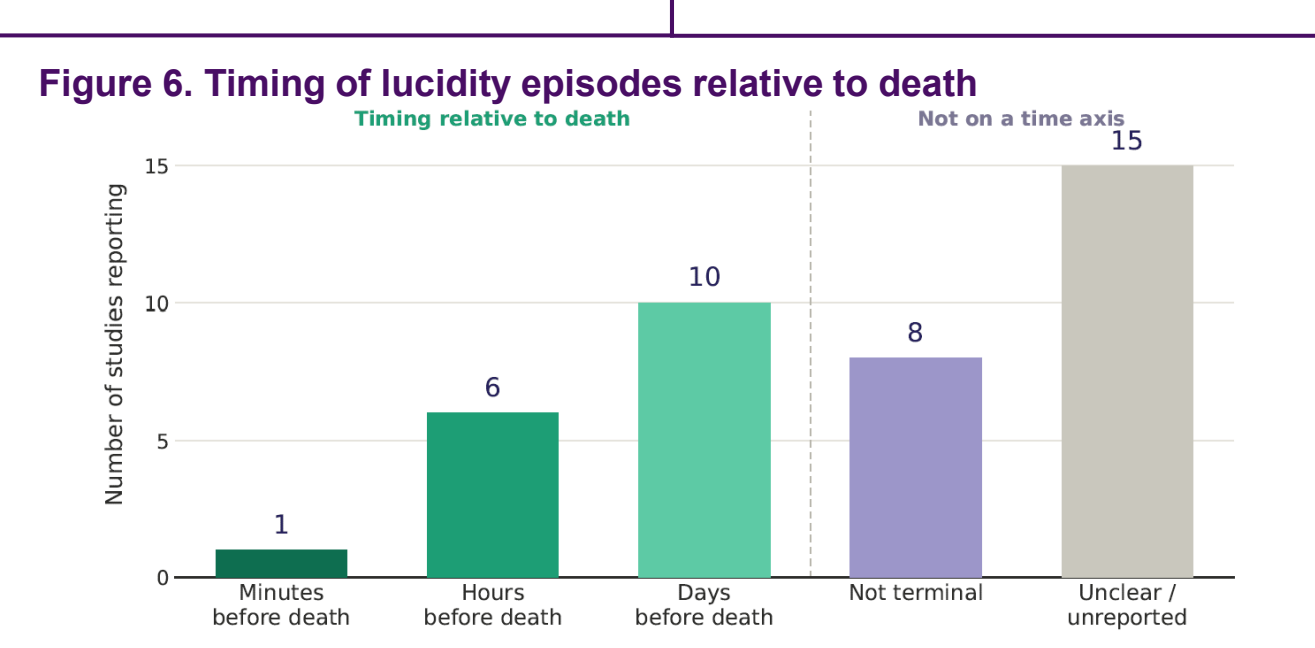
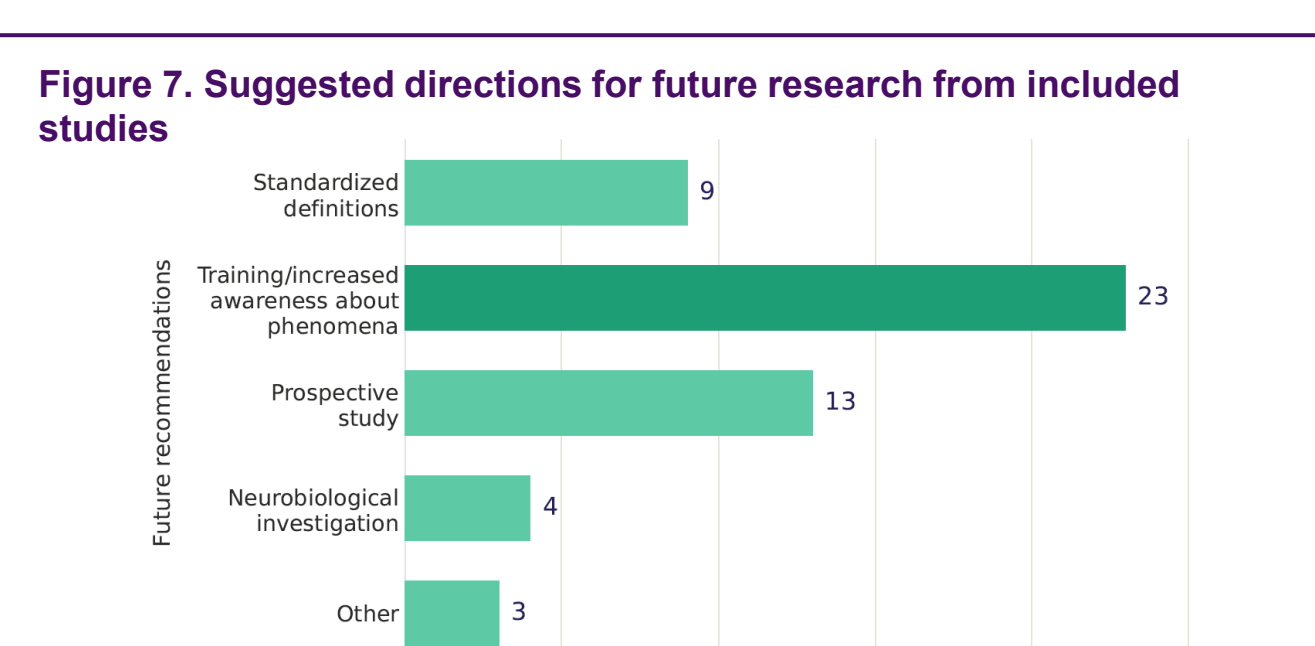


Figure 7. Suggested directions for future research from included studies



CONCLUSIONS

Episodes of lucidity have been reported across care settings, have been reported by various stakeholders, and share core phenomenological features despite substantial heterogeneity. These events carry meaningful emotional, clinical, and ethical implications. Standardized definitions and further research are needed to inform clinical guidance. Training and education should also be developed to support families, clinicians, and bedside staff.

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