

May He Rest in Peace

In the General Medicine Ward

During my cardiology rotation as a second year resident at a large community teaching hospital, I was the resident responsible for running code blues. I was not particularly fond of running code blues because of the chaos involved and because many of my previous codes were fatalities. I detested the sound of the code blue overhead page or the code blue pager.

One morning, I was awakened by a floor page and looked at my watch. It was 7 AM. The call was trivial and easily managed. I had a relatively quiet night and was anxious to finish my rounds at 8 AM. On that day, I had to drive to the airport to pick up my cousin flying in from San Francisco at 9 AM. The intern was capable and would take care of the CCU rounds with my relief resident. I brushed my teeth and prayed that a patient with acute myocardial infarction or unstable angina would not roll in at that hour.

At 7.45 AM, the code blue beeper went off. My initial thoughts were not pleasant. I put on my white coat and ran to the patient's bedside. I was one of the first to arrive and saw an unresponsive young man. I began to delegate responsibility and looked for intravenous access. The anesthetist arrived and was prepared to establish an artificial airway. The nurses were shouting

orders and my intern was poised for cardiac massage. Suddenly, the "coded" patient jumped to life, and we nearly jumped out of our skins.

"Can't a guy sleep in peace around here?!" he asked irately.

The patient's vital signs were stable, and he was now fully responsive and quite agitated. We called off the code blue and left the patient's room. I signed the code blue sheet and pacified the patient.

Apparently, a young and relatively inexperienced certified nurses' aide had approached the patient to record his vital signs and was unable to rouse him after several attempts. The patient was a frequent hospital visitor and did not wish to be disturbed. Instead of checking his vital signs and talking to the patient's nurse, she panicked and called a code blue! Sleep is said to be brief unresponsiveness from which arousal is easy. It apparently was not so this time.

This was one code blue call that I still sometimes ponder. It did convey a message that though time is of essence, be sure before you call a code. Fortunately, no harm was done, and I did make it to the airport on time.

—**Tapas Bandyopadhyay, MD, MRCP**
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