

A Memorable Case of Mouth-to-Mouth Resuscitation

In a General Hospital

Some 30 years ago, when I was an intern at Lancaster General Hospital in Lancaster, PA, there was no fear yet of HIV infection, and mouth-to-mouth resuscitation was still the norm. Whenever there was a code blue, the interns were expected to run to the code, because we were younger and in generally better shape than the attending physicians. The first intern who arrived at the scene was to take control of the airway, and the second was to start compressions. Nobody wanted to seem to be moving slowly, but everyone secretly wanted to be the second to arrive, because the first to arrive had to perform mouth-to-mouth resuscitation until the crash cart arrived with the bag-valve-mask ventilator.

I recall a particular code blue for which I arrived first, took control of the airway, and started mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. The intern who arrived second started chest compressions. The patient vomited, so we cleared the airway as best we could. I then continued with the resuscitation. Needless to say, there was still some vomitus in the patient's mouth. I could taste it

and smell it. The intern doing chest compressions never seemed to get tired and never asked to switch places. So I'd give the patient a breath, turn aside, retch, and then begin the process again.

This experience was not without reward, however. The patient not only was successfully defibrillated but walked out of the hospital under his own power, without any residual deficit. I went into medicine in order to save lives, so despite the memorable aspect of this code, I felt good about the case and its outcome.

At the time of my internship, emergency medicine was just a budding area that was not yet a specialty. After a stint in the Indian Health Service, however, I was able to choose emergency medicine as my specialty, despite previous plans to become an anesthesiologist. My experience saving lives on an emergent basis has been one of the things I have liked best about being in this specialty.

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