

A Memorable Episode of Ventricular Fibrillation

In the Intensive Care Unit

As a senior internal medicine resident, I was part of a team treating a middle-aged man who had had an acute myocardial infarction. Suddenly, he became unstable; the monitor showed ventricular fibrillation. We immediately defibrillated him, successfully reviving him. He awoke almost instantaneously, looked at us, and said, "Did I do something wrong?" About 5 minutes later, he again developed ventricular fibrillation. We again successfully defibrillated him. This time he said on awakening, "I really must be doing something wrong." We assured him that it was not his doing. After the familiar scenario of ventricular fibrillation and successful defibrillation occurred a third time, he was quiet and reserved on awakening, saying nothing.

About an hour passed, during which time the patient

experienced no more episodes of ventricular fibrillation; I was writing some notes when I saw him crying in his room, with a few family members standing around him. I went in to see if there was anything I could do. He told me that during the third episode, he felt as though he was walking toward a woman who, when he got close enough to see her, turned out to be his deceased mother. When he approached even closer, she said, "Son, I love you, but I don't want you with me yet." At that point he woke up from the ventricular fibrillation.

I still remember this conversation as one of the most touching moments in my career.

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