



VITALS

A Weekly Safety Newsletter For Medical Transport Professionals

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Make It Christmas Every Day

I remember the first Code Blue in which I actually did something. It was forty years ago. This happened before I became a paramedic. In fact, I had no formal training. Working in a hospital ER and ICU, I was the low man around and tasked with doing compressions. I had never seen CPR performed, but I guess my compressions were state of the art in 1969. Nobody gave me any instructions or criticisms. The defibrillator was the size of a portable TV. The tension in the room was worthy of any of the current "doc operas".



The entire episode perplexed me. The patient was a 92 year old blind man. We coded him for what seemed like forever and got him "beating and breathing". I couldn't grasp why we'd do all of this to a man with a disability at the end of life. The next day in ICU, the patient was sitting up in bed, listening to a baseball game and enjoying his lunch. He treated his plate like it was a clock: meat at noon, potatoes at 6. The game was a close one and he was excited. He was having a ball. I don't know how long he lasted, but I'll never forget how happy he looked. It was humbling for me to realize that my incompetent compressions played a small part in prolonging a life.

After I completed paramedic training and passed the various certification exams, I was held to performance standards that were based on the science of the day. The patch on my shoulder made me proud. It was important for me to know that each time I cared for a patient that my actions would exceed those required for basic competencies. This was really important for me at Christmas.



My family always had our big celebration on Christmas Eve. So, I was happy to work Christmas Day. When your base pay is \$750 per month, holiday pay is an incentive. One thing that I hated about working Christmas Day is every time I did, I ran a Code. Most of the time it was a grandpa who dropped dead while the family gathered around the tree opening presents. There is no good way to run a Code by a Christmas tree. The entire crew had competencies. We got there quickly and did all the right stuff. Trying to protect a justifiably hysterical family from the inherent ugliness of some of our interventions was tough. Back then we did intra-cardiac injections of epinephrine. Not a Christmas memory I wanted to give anybody. Although our crew had an annual higher than average save rate, I never participated in a successful resuscitation on Christmas Day.

Wouldn't it have been great to save grandpa on Christmas? I could have retained that warm feeling forever. What a great story to tell my grandchildren. Grandpa was a hero on Christmas. But are my first Code or my Christmas Codes really about me? Do I have any right to make a value judgment about which is more important?

It makes no difference if we are transporting a wheelchair bound patient to dialysis or extricating a trauma victim from a crashed car, it's not about us. It's about our professionalism which demands we perform our jobs in a fashion that exceeds "those required for basic competencies." All of our patients/clients place their trust in us to get them where they're going safely. If we remove our egos and needs from the equation, and add kindness and compassion to a safe transport we can make every day Christmas.