

Emotions and Memories Flooded My Mind

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It was towards the end of my 12-hour shift when the tones dropped for a possible 6-month old in respiratory distress. As we rushed out to the ambulance, my partners and I talked about it as we tried to mentally prepare for the worst and secretly hoped it was nothing. That said, even the most seasoned paramedic with me was not prepared for what we were heading into.

About 15 minutes later, we arrived on-scene. A grandfather with an infant in his arms was running out of the house toward us, yelling at us for taking too long. As I opened the back doors to get the stretcher, he thrust the infant into arms, pleading for me to save him. In that moment I climbed back into the truck and began performing CPR since I saw that the baby was unresponsive.

It took us 20 minutes to get to the hospital and our paramedic held the intubation tube in place for the last 10 minutes, refusing to let go in case it fell out while I continued to bag. Meanwhile the grandfather was up front in the passenger seat with the firefighter, screaming at us to do our jobs and that we were “killing his grandchild.” At the hospital, we rushed into the Children’s ER where the hospital staff took over. By then, the infant was gone and shortly afterward pronounced by the attending physician.

Not much later, I was prepping the EMS stretcher and the parents approached me. The father got in my face and screamed at me, “How could you kill our baby?” He pointed his finger towards my chest and said “You’re a lousy EMT and you don’t deserve to take care of anybody.”

It took all I had to maintain composure. Along with everyone else, I was already hurting and emotionally upset. At the end of my shift, I came home and just cried.

Luckily, two people in my family had EMS experience – and they helped me work through both the situation and my emotions. I asked my partner to bring his infant daughter over to the station the following Sunday. Spending some free time playing with her and sharing the joy of her innocence helped me to get a sense of relief, and regain my belief that everything will be okay. That little girl was a blessing.

Unfortunately, the effects of that incident don’t just go away. A few months later, I was dispatched to a home with a woman who was several months pregnant. We arrived to a miscarriage with the baby still attached. After cutting the cord, I had to carry the fetus to the ambulance. There, the state troopers took the photos required for the situation. I asked the trooper for 5 minutes alone. Inside the truck with doors shut, I cried as emotions and memories flooded my mind.

After regaining my composure as best as I could, I opened the ambulance door to let the trooper in. He told me “You’re stronger than I am.” There was nothing more to do than silently complete our reports.

It was a very quiet ride to the hospital. We did our best to comfort the mother while maintaining our own composure. Luckily that was our only call for the shift and I went home to decompress.

I share these experiences in all of my CPR classes to teach why it is so important to provide high quality CPR and recognize major emergencies when they happen. That helps the students, patients and me.