

# Preparing for the Unexpected: Are You Truly Ready?

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This past Sunday at church, I had the pleasure of hearing our preacher's sermon, titled *Preparing for the Unexpected*. The unknowns were: when, how, and where. I can't help but see the parallelism between preparations for those 3 "unknowns," and for a medical emergency. When will I have my medical emergency? How will I perform during one, and where will it take place? Consider the dental office medical emergencies we've read or heard about in the past year. Some of these had tragic results. In a recent issue of *ADA News*, David Wilson, DMD, talked about the day we all dread: calling 911 to our office.<sup>1</sup> Is it the unknown we dread?, Are we embarrassed that we aren't prepared? These are all questions we have asked ourselves, but what are we doing about it?

## Your State of Preparedness

Our profession has been blessed with individuals who lecture on this topic: Stanley Malamed, Larry Sangrik, Ernie Luce, and Mike Edwards, to name a few. These individuals report that their courses seem to always have a good turnout. What is the mystique? Do audiences like to hear case reports of something that happened so tragically, in another office? Be careful to criticize, because none of us know when that case report might be about our office. Do the participants lack a good foundation in medical emergency preparedness? An article written in the *Journal of Dental Education* states that training in dental schools have a large disparity in the number of hours dedicated to training for medical emergencies, and that a standardization of medical-emergency education needs to take place to ensure an appropriate level of training for all dental students.<sup>2</sup>

In an interview with Stanley Malamed, DDS, by Steven Diogo (published in the October 2004 issue of *Dental Practice Report*) Diogo asked Dr. Malamed, "What would you say is the general level of awareness and preparedness in the average general practice?" Dr. Malamed's response: "Poor. I've been teaching medical emergency preparedness for 30 years, and it's always been poor."

## Calling 911

Because none of us will know the when, how, and where of a medical emergency, all we can do is to prepare ourselves, our staff, and our facility by taking the necessary measures. The necessary measures are the 6 Links of Survival (which were discussed in the June issue of *Dental Interactive*) and are imperative for every dental practice. They are:

1. Dentist training
2. Staff training

3. Proper equipment
4. A medical emergency plan
5. An emergency drug kit (automatic external defibrillator [AED], vital signs monitors, portable oxygen, etc.)
6. Mock drills.

A recent post on a popular dental web site was about a young woman who had a heart attack at a dental office. Her cries to call 911 were ignored three times by the staff. Luckily, a patient in the waiting room did call 911, and she has recovered. Calling 911 shouldn't be something you dread. It is part of a plan to assist you in preserving the life of a patient, staff member, or yourself. Consider it your colleague when you need help. However, you must do your part by being able to keep patients alive until emergency medical services (EMS) arrives. Don't make calling 911 your "only" plan for medical emergencies. Do your part for 911/EMS, as well as for your patients, by taking charge of any deficiencies that you have in this area. This is your moral, ethical, legal, and professional obligation to your patient: to be fully prepared. Are you meeting the legal standard of care with medical emergencies in your office?

### *Legal Standard of Care*

All dentists employ local anesthetics. Be sure to notice what the package insert says on each can. It has a warning section that states: dental practitioners who employ local anesthetic agents should be well versed in diagnosis and management of emergencies which may arise from their use. Resuscitative equipment, oxygen, and other resuscitative drugs should be available for immediate use. This is a legal binding document.

### **PREPARE**

September was National Preparedness Month, as declared by the National Preparedness Coalition (NPC), part of the US Department of Homeland Security. The Institute of Medical Emergency Preparedness submitted the PREPARE campaign to the NPC ([www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov)). PREPARE is:

- Prevention—perform a thorough medical history on each patient.
- Recognition—be able to recognize signs and symptoms of any medical emergency.
- Education—be adequately trained and prepared for a medical emergency.
- Plan—have a thorough medical emergency plan, which includes a specific role/duty for each member of the dental team.
- AED—is the only treatment for a sudden cardiac arrest. Purchase one, and make sure everyone in the office knows how to use it.
- Respond—be able to react and respond confidently and quickly to a medical emergency. Proper training will prepare you to handle this stressful, chaotic event.

- Emergency drug kit—have one in your office. Everyone needs to know the contents of that kit as well as how to use it. Never let any drug become expired.

### Conclusion

If you fail to take the when, how, and where of a medical emergency seriously, the manner in which you handle a medical emergency will be very poor. As the old saying goes, “no one plans on failing, they just fail to plan.” If your office is unprepared, are you prepared to live with the fact that had you and your office been prepared, a difference could have been made in a person’s life?

You are either prepared or not. Which one are you? Prepare for the unexpected today like your life depended on it tomorrow.

*Drs. John B. Roberson and Chris M. Rothman are co-founders of the Institute of Medical Emergency Preparedness (IMEP,) developer of Emergency Response System (ERS,) the first and only in-office emergency protocol/patient rescue training system used for rapid deployment during a medical emergency by the dental team. ERS is endorsed by TDA Perks Program. TDA members can order the ERS at a discounted price at:*

*[www.EmergencyActionGuide.com](http://www.EmergencyActionGuide.com). In order to receive the TDA Perks Program discount, enter promotional code “TDA,” when placing your order online. You may also call (866) 729-7333 to order the ERS. Be sure to mention the TDA code.*

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### References

1. Wilson D. When a medical emergency takes place in the dental office. *ADA News*. 2007; 38(15):4-5.
2. Clark MS, Wall BE, Payne BC. A twenty-year follow-up survey of medical emergency education in US dental schools. *J Dent Educ*. 2006; 70(12):1316-1319.