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Stay Certified - You Never Know When You'll Need Your CPR  
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The Adorni Center gymnasium was noisy and bustling with people holding paddles. It was crowded on that Thursday morning because the rain had driven everyone indoors for play and I was looking forward to some rousing pickleball games. We had just started our first game when I heard a strange loud "THUD" followed by the clatter of a pickleball paddle skittering across the wooden floor.

I looked over to see my friend, "Keith", lying on the gym floor twitching and unconscious. My heart leapt into my chest and I ran over to see if I could help.

The gym was crowded and many people were looking my way. I heard someone say "Thank God there's a doctor here" and the gaze of a dozen people fell on me. I felt like saying "Shit, I'm a baby doctor. I've never done a resuscitation on anyone old enough to have teeth. I'm not prepared for this". Then autopilot kicked in and instead I intoned: "I know CPR".

Most of us groan whenever the biannual requirement to renew our CPR certification comes up. It's a class we have all done repeatedly, and generally cuts into our personal time on the weekend or in the evening. Kneeling over a dummy doing chest compressions makes my knees ache, and I always forget to bring a pillow or a garden kneeler. The material is repetitive and when it's not you feel chagrined for having learned something now known to be wrong. I really thought I would never need to use those skills.

"Keith" lay on the ground twitching and turning more and more dusky. A woman ran over who was a nurse. We checked for breathing and pulses but then he stopped twitching and lay still and turned blue. "Start CPR" I said, and "Amy" began chest compressions while I started mouth to mouth resuscitation. She was petite and lightweight, and I could see the chest compressions were not going deep enough. I asked for someone else to do CPR and a man began doing much deeper, more forceful compressions. My poor friend was blue-gray, and though the nurse pointed out that the new CPR recommendation included only chest compression and no ventilation, all my training in pediatrics combined with "Keith's" poor color made me feel ventilation was critical. We continued CPR for what seemed like forever but was probably only a few minutes when someone arrived with the facility's AED. "Amy", the nurse, opened the box and applied the patches. The only calm voice in the room was the deep baritone coming from the AED. "Analyzing rhythm"....."Shock Indicated"..."Press the orange button and clear patient" "Amy" announced that she was pressing the orange button and we all moved back a bit.

The jolt caused Keith's body to jerk forcefully once, and the most amazing thing happened: The dark blue gray color of his face and limbs slowly eased, and a flesh tone began to return. We watched hopefully and in awe, and then he gasped.

By the time the ambulance arrived "Keith" was breathing, pink, moving and making faint, low pitched noises. I don't think I've ever been so glad to hear incoherent groaning in my life. I decided to write about this for other physicians because I feel this experience gave me some insights that might be helpful to share.

First, if you are the only medical professional around, people will look to you for guidance. Even if you are a pathologist or a radiologist, you are a “doctor” and the expectation will be that in an emergency you will know what to do. Stay certified.

Second, in an emergency it is really hard to think clearly. It is incredibly hard to think critically while you are ventilating someone or doing chest compressions. I am glad someone brought the defibrillator because I didn’t even know they had one nor did I think to ask. I just kept ventilating, watching the chest compressions, and wondering how long ambulances take in Eureka. I was very lucky to have an incredible nurse with experience in emergency medicine present who helped with the resuscitation and applied the AED.

Third, if you don’t have a defibrillator, get one. I think I will keep an ambu bag and an AED in my trunk from now on.