

Why I Became an RT

By



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September of this year will mark my 30th year as a respiratory therapist. I have always been a “rescuer” at heart, and I have found a sense of adventure and challenge in our profession.

When I was very young, my favorite shows were those featuring a medical responder, like the paramedic played by Randolph Mantooth in the 1970s TV show “Rescue 51” (“Emergency!”) and “Medical Center” with Chad Everett.

These led to a teenage desire for water safety, which I fulfilled as a lifeguard at some beautiful beaches on the South Pacific island of Guam where we lived while my father was in the service.

As I finished high school and entered college, a new major came about, cardiopulmonary science, featuring baccalaureate training in respiratory care and echocardiology. This was my golden ring!

I spent the next 24 years at a wonderful hospital in Shreveport, LA, Christus Schumpert Medical Center, moving from staff therapist, to chief NICU therapist, to education coordinator, to manager. When the show “ER” began in the 1980s, I found myself critiquing Dr. Green (Anthony Edwards) and his staff, at least as far as airway management and advanced life support were concerned. I noted that this was the first show that I had ever seen that introduced the “respiratory therapist” to an audience. Dr. Green would shout, “Have respiratory set up a ventilator and get some gases!” I was thrilled.

About time!

My reaction to that moment told me how proud I was to be an RT. The opportunity to intervene in someone’s physical well-being is so profound, so honorable, that I have found nothing else to compare. During those days, I was a transport therapist on a BM-135 helicopter with some of the best therapists and nurses I have ever known. One of our rescues made the show “Rescue 911” with William Shatner. Being a “Trekkie” at heart, I found this a wonderful moment in my professional life.

Probably my two great loves in life are medical care and Christianity, for these deal with intervention and rescue — one of the body and the other of the soul. Today, as I sit in the office of director for a 550-bed medical facility in Jackson, MS, I am blessed with a team of more than

80 members. Yesterday I participated in the attempted resuscitation of an 84-year-old gentleman who succumbed to cancer. As I walked from the room with some of my staff, I paused to offer some words of condolence to his wife. As I left the woman with her pastor, I realized that this was the first time I had worked on a code response in some time. Memories of other times and places raced through my mind, some successful interventions, others not, people with families like this man, dreams and futures. I feel that I owe this profession my best every day, for it has given a military son with a heart for adventure and challenge a profession to be proud of and memories to treasure.

I came to this profession because I am a rescuer; I stay because I love to stay around rescuers and support what they do. My role today is to create an environment in which they can thrive and succeed. There has never been a better day for us than this. We make a difference!

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