

The Converted Paramedic

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The call: An ill person at restaurant

In November 2006, Medic 593 was called out for an ill person at a local restaurant. We found the patient sitting in the back of a police car. He had been driving erratically and ended up striking a parked car and trash can in the restaurant parking lot. The patient was alert but very confused, complaining of a headache, nausea, vomiting, weakness and dizziness. The patient's physical exam was normal, with no signs of trauma.

Hypoglycemia? Possible medication overdose?

At this point, I was sure I knew what was wrong with the patient--it was hypoglycemia. A check of the patient's blood sugar quickly proved me wrong. His sugar was 232 mg/dL. I thought about a medication overdose, but couldn't find anything to support that after searching the patient and his car. We had tried everything we could think of to determine why this patient was so altered, each time coming up blank.

Then someone suggested we try "that new piece of equipment." I was not one of the Rad-57's biggest fans; I thought it was just one more thing we had to carry around, taking up space on the truck. However, as we had gone through everything else with this patient, I didn't think it could hurt. Within 20 seconds, the Masimo Rad-57 had changed the entire direction of the call.

Masimo Rad-57 reveals the problem

The patient had a CO level of 40% with a SpO₂ of 94%. Now that we knew exactly what was wrong with the patient, we immediately began treatment with high flow O₂. With the patient's condition under control, we needed to find the source of the CO, in case there were others who were being poisoned along with the patient.

CO source: not in the home

As the patient was transported to the hospital, we had another engine respond to check the man's house and disabled wife. Fortunately, there was no CO found in the patient's residence and the wife was okay. Eventually, the source of the CO was attributed back to a bad exhaust system on the vehicle the patient had been driving.

Man might have been released back to a CO-poisoned environment

There was nothing about this patient, as he initially presented, which would have led us to suspect CO poisoning. If not for the Masimo Rad-57, he would have been just another altered mental status with unknown cause. We would have taken him into the ED where it is likely they would not have discovered the true cause of the patient's condition because he didn't have a history that would make carbon monoxide poisoning an obvious diagnosis. He would have been released from the ED back to his poisoned environment.

The Masimo Rad-57 took the guesswork out of diagnosis

The treatment for CO poisoning in the field is oxygen. That's the easy part. It is a matter of detection. Can you tell if it is food poisoning, the flu, a headache or is it actually CO poisoning? What about when your patient is too confused to appropriately answer your questions? The Masimo Rad-57 took the guesswork out of it for us. I thought it was just one more piece of equipment until I saw what a difference it made on this call. Now I wouldn't be without it.

Violet Township Fire Department

The Violet Township Fire Department in Pickerington, Ohio is about 20 miles outside of Columbus in Fairfield County. They cover 42 square miles and serve 30,000 residents in Pickerington, parts of Canal Winchester and Reynoldsburg. The department has 39 career firefighters, 22 part-time and 12 volunteers who respond to about 4,000 medical and fire calls per year.