

Room Tension

Room tension is exactly what it sounds like. It is what I like to call the *triad of chaos*. It is the level of stress, noise and confusion in the room during a medical urgency, or emergency. Typically, the more unstable the patient appears the more likely we are to experience this triad of chaos. It is during these scenarios that we are most likely to make mistakes, adding unnecessary risk to your patients' safety.

As Respiratory Therapists, we ARE the airway managers. Whether primary or secondary this is the most important task we perform in clinical practice. If you are at a facility where you have the responsibility of being the primary airway manager then you are at the head of the bed, taking control of the airway, preparing to put a tube in, and perhaps saving a life. Your team players must be able to respond to everything you need when you need it. Having your second and third set of tools nearby in case things go sideways, turning the monitors in your direction, sedating the patient when you are ready, etc.

Not only do you have an unwritten responsibility to decrease the room tension, you have the ability. The best tool you have is your ability to relax during a stressful circumstance. The higher the room tension is the quieter and slower you become. The side effect of this is the other team players in the room will begin to quiet down so they can hear what you are calling for. They get a sense of your relaxation and subconsciously begin to relax as well. One of my favorite phrases at this point is "relax boys and girls, no one is dying in this room today. We've got this". I smile a bit, some laugh a bit, it's kind of a joke and everyone in the room begins to get a little more comfortable.

Now, we ALL know that this phrase is not appropriate 100% of the time, but we usually have an instinctive gut feeling if the situation is grim. Either way, RELAX. You know that you have other tools nearby in case you encounter a difficult airway. You already know what you need to do 2nd, 3rd, 4th, etc. in case the first method of intubation is unsuccessful. You probably have a Physician (ED, Anesthesia, etc.) on stand-by in case you need assistance from someone with more advanced skills. You can relax and get comfortable with your skills.

This works almost every single time IF you do this every single time because your team players will come to expect this behavior of you. When you're in the room and you are relaxed and comfortable with the situation they will get a sense of that and instinctively they will begin to relax and get a bit more comfortable. "No one's allowed to panic until I do". Say it often, and live it.

My final thought: We ARE the BEST at what we do. Believe that in your heart. Take pride in your skills. Be proud, and above all... Be safe...