



by Sherri Stigler, Training & Operations Manager

From Helpless to Hopeful

T-CPR Protocols Empower Dispatchers in Monroe County

Monroe County dispatcher Jessica Jandt has learned firsthand that her expanded ability to provide CPR instructions to bystanders of cardiac arrest is more than just a tool...it's a mindset.

Dispatchers in Monroe County did not always have the ability to provide CPR instructions over the phone.

"We didn't do any Emergency Medical Dispatch; we didn't give any instruction or even have the ability to transfer the calls to anyone who could give instruction," explains Jandt. "It's difficult to think about it now that we do give instruction; it's a night and day difference." In the past, Jandt says, "When we couldn't do anything...it was such an overwhelming feeling of helplessness. All we could do was to try to comfort callers."

Helpless to hopefulness

But that helpless feeling has now been transformed into one of hopefulness. This spring, Jandt and her dispatch compadres were trained in the updated State T-CPR protocols by WEMSA instructors Amanda Bates and Marc Cohen. Staff were a little hesitant and first, and Jandt admits it was a 'little nerve wracking.'

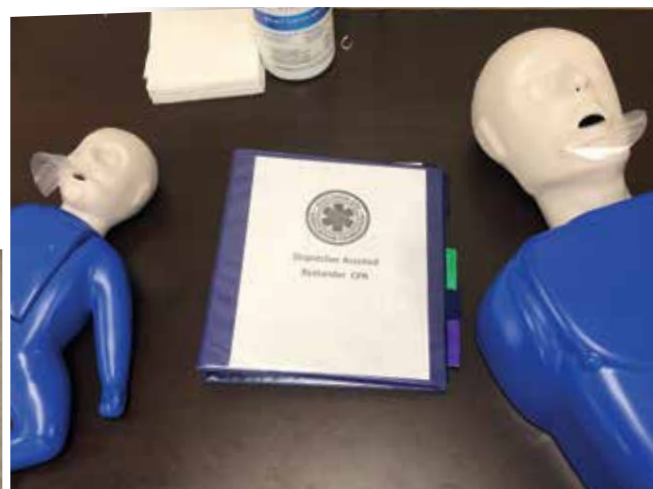
"I've been CPR trained myself, but I wondered how I was going to do this over the phone," she says. She didn't have to wonder for long – she says the training was great and she found high

value in mock scenarios where callers (the trainers) were separated from the dispatcher (Monroe staff). The frantic caller part was well played by the



WEMSA team and provided for some extremely realistic training.

"The dramatization was awesome and it really helped us understand that we can do this," says Jandt. "The results have been nothing short of amazing." After the training was complete, two of the dispatchers offered to be 'champions' of the program and went to work organizing the protocol into laminated pages inside binders; which are placed at every station, making them extremely convenient for dispatchers to grab at a



moment's notice. Williams explains there has also been an uptick in situational awareness and teamwork among the staff.

Improved teamwork

"When one of the dispatchers takes a call and the others overhear that person start asking questions like 'Is he breathing?' you will see another dispatcher reaching for

the binder and open it for their partner," say Williams. "They are on top of it; everyone works towards the same goal of saving lives. It's incredible to see."

Shortly after the training and implementation of the protocol earlier this year, Jandt took a frantic 911 call from a caller whose relative had collapsed in front of him.

"The caller was panicked," she says, "but I was lucky because he had some CPR training, and I was able to get him doing chest compressions. He did great and followed my instructions." Jandt says her partners took over covering her dispatch duties while she tended to the caller.

"We were counting compressions together; we were in it together," she recalls. She explains that while the patient did come back for a short time, unfortunately he passed away at the hospital. But even though the outcome wasn't what they hoped for, there was

still cause to be grateful.

"Experiencing that feeling of closure and knowing that the caller and I did everything we could to help save him, that is all we can really ask for," she notes.

Program boosts confidence

Randy Williams, who serves as the Administrator for the Monroe County 911 Communications Center, has been a supportive and outspoken advocate for the program. Williams explains that since the protocol inception, he has noticed two significant changes in his dispatch staff.

"Their confidence is evident, and I have noticed the increase in their ability to be assertive in getting a reluctant caller to calm down and comply with direction," he says. Continual encouragement and the 'You CAN do it' message to callers has really made a big difference in their willingness to step in and do something to help someone."

The new T-CPR protocol has, as of this writing, been provided to callers in about seven cases so far.

"All of the cases are so different," says Williams. "One was a choking call.

> continued on page 29

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From Helpless to Hopeful

> continued from page 20



Another was a 7-year-old child who was having a seizure and then stopped breathing. That one was a successful save!” In that case, Williams explains it was especially helpful to the parent who called in because the dispatcher’s own child had experienced seizure activity, and she was able to relate to the parent on the phone.

Some calls are a struggle for dispatchers because they simply can’t help enough. One of the dispatchers took a call from a patient who was alone and having serious breathing trouble. She continued to talk to the caller, encouraging him to sit down, trying to talk to him and calm him. Being located far into a rural setting, it took a long time for EMS to arrive, and the patient’s breathing continued to decrease until the dispatcher heard nothing on the other end of the line. These are the times dispatchers long for the superpowers to reach through the phone lines.

Promoting partnership

Monroe County continues their service excellence by completing Quality Assurance/Improvement on every call they provide instruction on. Their paramedic partners from Tomah help with the process.

“We have a really good working relationship with our EMS partners,” says Jandt. “We have a wonderful line of communication, and they are more than willing to help us critique calls and work side by side with us.”

Those serving in EMS and dispatch know that sometimes dispatch gets information from callers that is contrary to

what EMS finds when they arrive. Jandt agrees that it is important for everyone to understand what the caller reported over 911, because that is what drives their instruction.

“We really appreciate their partnership and being willing to take the time to respond to our requests when we have questions about what happened, because we are all on the same team,” says Jandt.

Moving forward, feeling empowered, ready and anxious to deploy lifesaving instructions, the Monroe County dispatch staff is prepared when the next 911 call rings. Adrenaline kicks in and they seize their roll as the ‘first’ first responders...no longer helpless; instead full of hope. 🔄

Sherri is a 30-year survivor of the public safety community, serving in the capacity of Police Officer, Firefighter, EMT-B, AHA CPR/First Aid Instructor, Dispatcher and Communications Supervisor. She currently holds the position of Training and Operations Manager for Waukesha County Communications, a consolidated communications center in Southeastern Wisconsin. Sherri is a columnist for the Journal magazine at the International Academy of Emergency Dispatch and has written many articles emphasizing public safety and 911 education.

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