Veteran's Life Saved Thanks to Mock Code Training Program

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Springfield VA Clinic located in Springfield, Ohio. (VA Courtesy Photo)

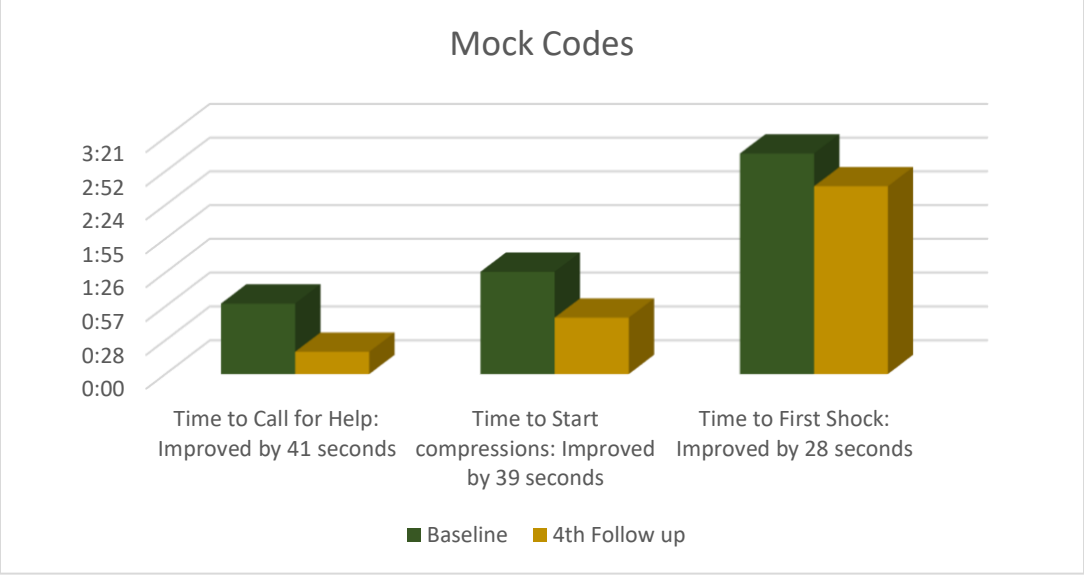
The quick actions of medical professionals at the Springfield, Ohio VA Clinic, that saved a Veteran's life were the direct result of the staff's training. In July 2022, the Veteran arrived at the clinic, and, within two minutes, staff observed the patient sweating, showing signs of weakness, chest pain, arm numbness and shortness of breath. These are all signs that a patient might be 'coding,' or a term for a person experiencing cardiac arrest. When the Veteran became unresponsive, staff members immediately began cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), called 911 and used an automated external defibrillator (AED). Within minutes, the patient regained their pulse and consciousness but remained sweaty and gray. Emergency medical service (EMS) crews arrived approximately 15 minutes after the 911 call. The Veteran lost their pulse again and EMS crews and clinic staff resumed chest compressions and used a manual resuscitation bag to provide ventilation and oxygen. The patient became responsive again and was transported to nearest hospital for treatment. Six months before this real-life medical event happened, staff members prepared for situations like this in the simulation-based Mock Code Program.

"This Veteran was very lucky he walked into Springfield," Dr. Scott D. Bleser, assistant chief of primary care service at Dayton VA Medical Center, said. "The well-trained team saved his life by performing basic life support procedures. They took immediate action and quickly initiated CPR, summoned EMS and used the AED. Quick assessment, quick action and superb teamwork resulted in this Veteran having a tomorrow."

The entire medical event lasted 22 minutes from beginning to end and serves as an example of how a successful coding incident should be handled. The Springfield VA Clinic credits its Mock Code Program

for helping to save their Veteran patient's life this past summer. The journey to this moment began in 2018 when an evidence-based practice project was conducted at Dayton VA Medical Center (VAMC), one of the VA Dayton Healthcare System locations, identifying a need for simulated mock code training. The project revealed medical staff had slow response times to codes and low confidence in providing CPR. According to the American Heart Association (AHA), high survival rates after cardiac arrest are associated with planned practice, rapid recognition, prompt CPR and early defibrillation. Based on its findings and guidance from the AHA, Dayton VAMC's Mock Code Program focused on initial staff response and the first 3-5 minutes of a code event.

Thanks to this training, Dayton VAMC's Mock Code Program saw success in three areas: time to call for help, time to start compressions and time to first shock. The training proved seconds matter when it comes to saving a life. The time it took for staff to call for help improved by 41 seconds; the time it took for staff to start compressions improved by 39 seconds; and the time it took for staff to initiate a first shock improved by 28 seconds.



Conducting the Mock Code Program has done much more than just assist in improving response times, it has also helped staff identify system issues, address skill and knowledge shortfalls and improved staff confidence. Programs like this one support VA's journey to become a high reliability learning organization. The Simulation Learning, Evaluation, Assessment, and Research Network (SimLEARN) has developed a standardized approach to mock codes that allows for customization by each facility through its Resuscitation Education and Innovation (REdI) program. This program raises the standard from merely evaluating whether guidelines have been met to having facilitators evaluate team dynamics and the care environment to identify hidden safety risks.

The Springfield VA Clinic is proud to share their journey and successes with using mock code training in hopes of it helping to save more lives like the Veteran they saved at their facility.