

EDITORIAL

Resuscitation

IN 1774, Dr. William Tossach, described the following experiences in "Medical Essays and Observations."

"November 11th, 1732, early in the Morning, an unusual Steam was observed to come out of a Coal-pit in this Neighbourhood, which the People who went down to enquire the Cause of it found to be the Smoak of Coals that lay about ten Fathoms from the Bottom of the Pit. The Pit was shut up to smother the Flame and continued thus shut till December 3rd. When re-opened it sent out a most nauseous Steam, so that no Body could come near it, except to the Windward. After some Hours the Colliers ventured down by the Ladders into the Pit, which was thirty-four Fathoms deep, but soon came running up, all panting and breathless; they that came latest, being scarce able to speak so much as to tell that one of their Number was left dead. A little later some men re-entered the pit and carried out the poor man. When he came to the Mouth of the Pit, which was between half an Hour and three Quarters after he had been left in the Bottom of it, I made them immediately set him down and turn him supine. The Colour of the Skin was natural except where it was covered with Coal-dust; his Eyes were staring open, and his Mouth was gaping wide; his Skin was cold; there was not the least Pulse in either Heart or Arteries, and not the least Breathing could be observed; so he was to all Appearance dead. I applied my Mouth close to his, and blowing my Breath as strong as I could, but having neglected to stop his Nostrils, all the Air came out at them; wherefore, taking hold of them with one Hand, and holding my other on his Breast, I blew again as strong as I could, raising his chest fully with it, and immediately I felt six or seven very quick Beats of the Heart; his Thorax continued to play, and the Pulse was felt soon after in the Arteries. His eyes and mouth remained opened and for more than half an hour there was not so much as a groan, though the chest continued to play much "as a Pair of Bellows would have done."

"After about an Hour he began to yawn, and move his Eye-lids, Hands and Feet; in an Hour more he came pretty well to his Senses, but knew nothing of all that had happened after his lying down at the Foot of the Ladders, till his awakening. Within four Hours he walked Home, and in as many Days returned to his Work. I must submit to better Judges to determine whether the Experiment was the Mean of Saving the Man's Life."

This is an excellent description of a method of resuscitation that is equally as valuable and effective today as it was 200 years ago. Unfortunately, many of the present day medical graduates have not been sufficiently impressed with the importance of mouth to mouth insufflation. Too often when confronted with a patient who has stopped breathing, a doctor's first reaction is to inject some drug or to send for a mechanical resuscitative apparatus. Much valuable time is often lost by these procedures.

Yes, I think we will all agree that Dr. William Tossach's experiment of mouth to mouth insufflation was the means of saving the man's life.

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