



A New York Save: AED-Trained Member on the Scene

On June 15, a day like any other, PASS Chapter NE3 member Robert Lynn was working at the New York Terminal Radar Approach Control (TRACON) facility, where he also serves as the Communications unit PASS representative. However, what started out as a typical day quickly changed when Lynn's coworker, Neil O'Toole, an air traffic controller, suffered sudden cardiac arrest. When Air Traffic Operations Manager Jeffrey Brooks ran into the equipment room looking for someone trained on the Automated External Defibrillator (AED), Lynn knew he had to take action.

"I was working in the Communications unit at the time, only steps away from the where the AED was located," said Lynn. "I hollered back that I knew how it worked and proceeded to run with Brooks to the NATCA computer room, where we found Neil O'Toole lying unresponsive on the floor."

Lynn explained that Air Traffic Management Coordinator Terry Ryan was already at O'Toole's side. He quickly told Ryan that he had recently had CPR/AED training and gave him instructions on how to operate the AED. Prior to Lynn arriving on the scene, Mike Pitt, another air traffic controller who was with O'Toole at the time of the incident, had performed chest compressions after calling for help.

"Ryan and I took over from that point, both of us alternating in performing CPR," said Lynn. "I started, giving Neil two rescue breaths followed by 30 chest compressions. After placing the AED pads on O'Toole's chest, the device analyzed him and announced that a shock was advised. Ryan administered the first shock and then continued CPR." Lynn shared that O'Toole began to breathe shallowly after the first shock but stopped breathing again quickly thereafter. The pair continued CPR on O'Toole until the AED advised another shock. "After Ryan administered a second shock I continued CPR. O'Toole then began to breathe again, snoring loudly." In the meantime, controller Josh Hagermann, a volunteer paramedic, returned after retrieving oxygen from his medic bag, and was able to administer oxygen just as O'Toole began breathing.

Lynn is convinced that O'Toole survived because of the quick thinking and effective actions taken by everyone involved. "In CPR/AED training, we learned that timing is critical when attempting to resuscitate someone. We were taught to perform a very specific set of actions in order to maximize a person's survival rate. And, despite the fact that the Air Traffic personnel present were not trained in CPR or in the use of an AED, except for two air traffic controllers who happened to be volunteer paramedics, everyone worked together as a team. We followed the prescribed CPR/AED training protocol and O'Toole made a complete recovery."

Following the incident, Director of CPR/AED Training for Emergency University Frank Poliafico stated that the actions of all those involved were so rapid and efficient that even O'Toole's cardiologist did not believe he experienced a heart episode. Poliafico stated that both he and O'Toole's cardiologist were absolutely amazed to see him up and walking around without



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any lasting damage only eight days after the traumatic event.

Of all the actions taken to save O'Toole's life, Lynn believes using the AED made the most difference. "I think every federal employee should at least be shown how easy an AED is to operate. I also believe that all ATC personnel should receive CPR/AED training in the event a similar emergency occurs. O'Toole probably would not have survived had it not been for those present who had this training."

Lynn said he was amazed at how calm, organized and efficient everyone on the scene was throughout the incident. "During the ordeal, my CPR/AED training kicked in as if I was on autopilot," he revealed. "I was calm and focused, having just been retrained in CPR/AED and first aid less than a month before. It was only afterward, upon returning to the equipment room to decompress, that I was able to truly comprehend the severity of what had just happened. In fact, it wasn't until a few days later, while at home with my wife and daughter on Father's Day, that I realized how fortunate Neil really was. For me, this was one of the most humbling experiences of my life. If nothing else, this event taught me how fragile life is, how quickly things can go wrong and that we should all take the time to appreciate what's truly important and cherish the time we have left."

PASS applauds the actions taken by PASS member Robert Lynn and all of those involved who made the ultimate save.