

I am a 9-1-1 dispatcher. I have had special training and need special skills to be able to handle any kind of call that comes in. I am the first first responder. I am the voice on the other end of the phone that people speak to on the worst day of their lives. I handle those 'worst day' calls multiple times per hour. I arrive at work at 3:45am each day. I work 10 hour shifts, which are often stretched to 12-hours when our staffing is limited.

During the first hour at work, when everyone considering this bill for passage is likely still asleep, I might take a medical call from someone whose symptoms I need to immediately recognize as a stroke, heart problem or seizure in order to get the correct help to them before their condition worsens. Seconds count. If that person becomes unconscious and stops breathing normally, I will give the caller instructions to allow them to do effective Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation until trained medical help arrives in person. Seconds count. In those minutes between report and response, the chances of someone surviving a condition in which they need immediate CPR are reduced by 40 - 50 percent or more if I am not there to give instructions to the untrained friend or family member who is frantically trying to do something, anything, to help their loved one. Seconds count.

In my 10 years in this profession, I have delivered babies over the phone before medics could arrive. I have spoken to people in hostage situations before police negotiators could arrive. I have given instructions to people in burning apartment buildings and helped them safely evacuate before fire units could arrive on scene. I have also been the final, calming voice on the phone for people who have passed away before help could get to them. I have been the first voice to speak to people in the horrifying moments after something terrible has happened to their partner or their child. I listen to traumatic events unfold every day. When I arrive at home after a long work shift, I hug my baby girl because I know how precious these moments are, the short time some of us have on this planet with each other between birth and death.

We are not clerical personnel. We do not file papers; instead, we dispatch emergency personnel to save lives. We do not write memos; rather, we give specialized medical instructions over the phone to help people stop the bleeding or save someone from choking or use an AED to shock someone's heart back to life. We do not set appointments, because emergencies do not happen by appointment. We do not take dictation; instead, we calm a frantic caller on the phone, while simultaneously getting critical information to our responders in the field, handling incoming radio traffic on a separate channel, and typing copious-yet-meticulous notes we may be called on in court to defend at a later time. To call what we do 'clerical work' is to do a disservice to any person who has ever called 9-1-1 and spoken to a professional like me, a dispatcher who handled the worst day of their life effectively, with professionalism, efficiency and empathy.

I am not an anomaly in my workplace. There are 60 other dispatchers I work with at the second largest 9-1-1 center in Oregon whose stories are at least as brave, harrowing, triumphant, and tragic as my stories. We are 9-1-1 dispatchers. We are the 'first first responders,' and I ask that you recognize us as such.

Thank you for the important work you do. Please demonstrate you understand the importance of ours.