

ORCHESTRA

Angela Guzman, MD

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The conductor in the red hat stood at the head of the patient's bed, his arms crossed as he assessed the status of the 33-year-old man who had just been hit by a semi-truck. He was deep in thought, mentally processing the condition of his crashing patient. The team members ran into the room and instinctively donned blue gowns, caps, and gloves. Then they stood in attention at the patient's side, awaiting command. Without hesitation each member performed their task at the signal of the conductor. Moving rhythmically they simultaneously worked together towards one goal: to save a life. I desperately wanted to be a functional member of the team, so I stood in attention awaiting my command, holding blankets to cover the patient once he stabilized. As each member worked quickly to complete their task, the conductor watched the monitors for signs of improvement. The surgery residents inserted chest tubes, but did not yield signs of reassurance; there was no blood or rush of air. Concurrently, the ED resident did an ultrasound searching for blood around the heart, abdomen, or pelvis. Again, the test was negative. In spite of being given liters of fluids, the patient's blood pressure began to drop quickly. The seasoned conductor must have anticipated the event because he augmented the tempo effortlessly. Following his command, three men stood in a line at the patient's side, and the largest man started the chest compressions. His pace was methodical and his arms were powerful as he compressed the chest wall. The clinical pharmacist marched forward to supervise the administration of the pressor agents while the conductor assessed the monitor for signs of a shockable rhythm. After multiple rounds of the same dance the conductor finally decided to end the symphony. Time of death: 11:59. At the conclusion of the performance the conductor removed his red hat and bowed his head. He thanked the team for their efforts and stated that he would notify the family. As he was signing forms, I heard him confess that he felt the patient's final pulse and watched him take his last breath at the beginning of the code. I was naive to believe that this symphony would end with a cheerful melody as we stabilized the patient and rolled him to the ICU. I spent the rest of my shift replaying his song in my head while the other members of the orchestra changed the tune.

Angela Guzman graduated from the FSU College of Medicine in 2014.

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