
Zoom On: Dr Arthur Kanowitz



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*****@***airwaysafetymovement.org

Co-Chair, Airway Safety
Workgroup - Patient Safety
Movement Foundation

Dr Arthur Kanowitz has been an emergency medicine doctor for over 36 years and has spent the last 16 years focused on patient safety. From 2008 to 2017, Dr Kanowitz served as Colorado State Emergency Medical and Trauma Services (EMTS) Medical Director for Colorado's Department of Public Health and Environment. Dr Kanowitz now serves as the Chair of the Airway Safety Workgroup for the Patient Safety Movement Foundation (PSMF). He is also co-founder of the Airway Safety Movement and co-founder and chairman of Securisyn Medical, a company which has obtained FDA approval for an airway management device to prevent unplanned extubation.

What are your key areas of interest and research?

I started my career in medicine as a paramedic, went on to earn my MD degree at University of Colorado School of Medicine, and completed a residency in Emergency Medicine at Denver General Hospital.

I spent the early part of my career as an emergency physician. I remained active in EMS as the Medical Director for numerous agencies and ultimately was appointed by the Governor of Colorado to act as the EMS and Trauma Medical Director for the State of Colorado, which I did for nearly a decade.

While working with paramedics, I became aware of the problem of unplanned extubation (UE), the unintentional and uncontrolled removal of a patient's life-sustaining breathing tube. I began to research the topic and found that UE costs \$4.9 billion in preventable healthcare costs. UE is also very common – occurring in over 121,000 patients in U.S. adult Intensive Care Units (ICUs) alone, and is associated with 33,000 deaths yearly. Yet, even in this COVID-19 environment heavily reliant on intubation, most people have never even heard of this problem.

After learning about UE, I dedicated my efforts to awareness and prevention, founding both the [Airway Safety Movement](#), an advocacy group, and [Securisyn Medical](#), a startup medical device company dedicated to eliminating UE, which has recently received FDA clearance for an airway stabilisation device.

I am also the co-chair of the Society for Airway Management (SAM) Special Projects II (SPII) Committee. As part of our UE awareness and prevention activities, the SAM SPII Committee developed a Coalition of 20 medical professional societies, patient safety organisations and quality improvement organisations to lead the UE Awareness and Prevention Campaign.

What are the major challenges in your field?

Airway management refers to a group of procedures meant to sustain a patient's life by properly managing control of their airway and providing life-sustaining ventilation. Yet, despite the best of intentions and the best current technologies, harm and death can come from these procedures that are supposed to be life-sustaining or lifesaving. UE is an example of how a medical procedure can go deadly wrong, yet despite its cost and ubiquity, the gravity of this safety event is commonly not acknowledged as valid. So my biggest challenge, at this time, is to increase awareness about how common and costly UE is and encourage all hospitals to track UE, just like they track other quality measures such as sepsis, hospital acquired infections, pressure injuries and many more.

What is your top management tip?

My guiding management principle is to always start with the 'why.' Why I do what I do every day.

[Drew Hughes](#) lost his life at age 14, not from the minor head injury he sustained while skateboarding. He died, a preventable death, when his life-sustaining breathing tube, that was supposed to keep him alive, became dislodged.

For me, it is because of people like Drew and the countless number of patients who die or are harmed from preventable causes related to their care, and because of the family, friends and caregivers who suffer with them.

What would you single out as a career highlight?

Co-founding Securisyn Medical with my daughter, Elyse Blazeovich. Watching her take my dream to reality. We built a team that has taken us through nine years of research and development, extensive human factors, design validation and verification, and finally, manufacturing, to get our airway stabilisation system into initial limited market use in several hospitals throughout the U.S. Last week I stood in the ICU next to a patient that was on life support using our SolidAIRity Airway Stabilization System. After 16 years of hard work, the device I invented finally has the opportunity to save thousands of lives yearly.

If you had not chosen this career path you would have become a...?

I don't think I would ever choose a different path. My medical career has afforded me everything I could ever want.

What are your personal interests outside of work?

My family (wife, three children, six grandchildren), golf, gardening and walking.

Your favorite quote?

"If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader." Simon Sinek

"The breakthroughs that change the course of science, business, and history – fail many times before they succeed." Safi Bahcall, author of Moonshots

Published on : Fri, 5 Jun 2020