Lewis' Story – "It's Hard to Kill a Healthy 15-Year Old"

Lewis Blackman, was a healthy, gifted 15-year-old. He underwent elective surgery for pectus excavatum – a crease in the chest cavity

Thursday, November 2

Lewis and his family arrive at the hospital at 6 a.m. for the 7:30 operation

The anticipated 45 minute surgery lasts 2.5 hours

The lead surgeon emerges from the OR and says "I had to reposition the metal bar in Lewis' chest four times to get it right. All in all, Lewis did fine"

Lewis wakes in the recovery room. He tells doctors that his pain is about a "three" on a 1-10 scale

Lewis is given Toradol, a powerful painkiller to ease his chest pain

Nurses and doctors note in Lewis' record that he isn't producing urine

Lewis is taken to Room 749 in the Children's Cancer Ward. There's no room in the surgery ward

Friday, November 3

The surgeon that operated on Lewis leaves for the weekend

Saturday, November 4

At 9 a.m. another surgeon checks on Lewis and writes in medical record, "No evidence of infection. Clear lungs. May sit up and consider getting out of bed"

On Saturday night, Lewis begins to run a slight fever, his feet are cold to the touch, he is still on Toradol by intravenous line

Sunday, November 5

At 6:30 a.m., a half-hour after another Toradol injection, Lewis gasps - he has horrible pain in his upper abdomen

"It's the worst pain imaginable," Lewis says to his mother and tells the nurse it is "five on a scale of five"

The nurse tells Lewis and his mother, Helen, that the pain is gas. "There's nothing I can do for gas pain," she says

In nurses' notes that morning, a nurse writes, "gas pains, patient needs to move around"

Another nurse suggests a bath. She and Helen put Lewis in the tub and sponge him off

"Afterward, he sits in the chair for a few minutes. This is a tremendous expenditure of energy for him. He seems to be getting weaker and weaker," Helen writes later in a diary that reconstructs Lewis' death

Nurses insist Helen walk Lewis. Lewis says his pain is getting worse. Over Lewis' feeble protests, mother and son walk around the ward

Lewis' belly grows hard and distended, his temperature drops, his skin grows pale and he drips with a constant cold sweat. His eyes are sunken. He's exhausted, in great pain

Helen calls the nurse a number of times. "She seems convinced that Lewis is simply lazy and not walking enough to dissipate his 'gas pain,'" Helen writes in her diary

During Sunday, Helen repeatedly asks for a doctor

At 6:26 p.m., Helen's insistence is such that a nurse writes in Lewis' record: "Parent requesting upper level MD"

At 8:00 p.m., the chief resident comes to Lewis' room to check him, writes in the record: "probable ileus", orders a suppository, and notes that Lewis' heart rate is in the 80s. The nurse notes from the same time record Lewis' heart rate is 126 and that the MD has been made aware of Lewis' sweating

Monday, November 6

The MD says the sweating and lowered temperature - 97.7 degrees are "side effects" of the medicine because Lewis is so young

That night, Lewis' heart rate is 142 beats per minute and his temperature is 95 degrees. At 4 a.m., his heart rate is 140 and his temperature is 96.6.

An aide takes Lewis' vital signs. She can't find any blood pressure

From 8:30 to about 10:15 a.m., Lewis' record reflects that others try and fail to detect a blood pressure

Residents and nurses believe the blood pressure devices are broken. They try various devices, according to Lewis' medical record

Nurses' notes record Lewis' vital signs. At 8:30 a.m., his heart rate is 96 beats per minute

About noon, two technicians arrive to take a sample of Lewis' blood for tests. They get just a small sample. "Lewis is deathly pale," Helen wrote. "As they take his blood, his speech becomes slurred. He is trying to say something I can't understand. He says it again, very carefully and with great difficulty: 'It's ... going ... black."

Helen calls for help. She thinks Lewis has had a seizure

A cardiac code is called. The code team works for 1 hour

Doctors record Lewis' death at 1:23 p.m. Monday - 31 hours after Lewis first said he was having horrible stomach pains

Where did the system fail Lewis and his family?

Use the following questions to guide your analysis of this event. Record your answers and thoughts in the space provided

1. Where were the system failures in Lewis's care process related to **organization, environment**, **technology, work tasks, health care provider**?
2. Where in the process of care did **incidents** (errors, near misses, adverse events, and harm) occur?
3. Were their opportunities in the process of care to **repair physical damage**? **Repair relational damage**? **Repair emotional damage**?
4. What are the key **learning points** and how do we learn from this incident to proactively prevent similar incidents from occurring in the future?

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1. **System failures:**
   Organization

   Environment

   Technology

   Work tasks

   Health care provider

   Other

2. **Incidents:**
   Errors

   Near misses

   Adverse events

   Harm

3. **Opportunities:**
   To repair physical damage

   To Repair relational damage

   To Repair emotional damage

   Other

4. **Key learning points for preventing similar events:**