Biathlon

I would guess that most people who read these editorials have heard of the biathlon. This is a very popular sport in Northern European countries, particularly in Czechoslovakia, Russia, Slovenia, etc. It is an interesting sport because it requires stamina, skill, mental toughness, and the ability to move the body as fast as possible over difficult terrain, then stop, slow down the heart rate, focus, and shoot at small targets very far away. For those who are unfamiliar with the sport, the biathlon is a combination of difficult cross-country skiing intermixed with stopping points at which the athlete must take a rifle off his or her back and shoot at targets. The score is dependent on the speed the course is finished, the number of targets hit, minus the number of targets missed and where the targets were hit. The interesting thing about this sport is that even elite athletes, while skiing, have a significant raise in heart rate, perhaps over 200 beats a minute. When they come to the area of the targets, the secret the athletes have of the sport is to slow down, slow the heart rate down, slow the breathing down to compose themselves, and then focus. I don't know about you, but this reminds me a lot about my days at work, particularly when performing numerous interventional radiology procedures.

Perhaps our area is unique, but I doubt it. In our division, we perform procedures under fluoroscopy, CT, and ultrasound. We also perform procedures portably. Admittedly this is not as common as it used to be, but in our institution we are placing chest tubes, performing intra-abdominal abscess drainages, and percutaneous cholecystectomies on a regular basis. If you add vascular procedures that are performed primarily under fluoroscopy, this makes for a busy day during which the

interventionist is running in many different directions to try and get the clinical work done. Now add your clinic, and the fact that you may or may not be seeing interventional patients either on the wards or in your office, and you see why it's like a biathlon.

The other day I was running from CT back to fluoroscopy and had to change my focus, slow down to change my heart rate, and try to assist with what normally was a very easy procedure—a G to J conversion in a post-operative patient. In this particular case, I didn't perform my biathlon maneuvers very successfully. I was rushed and I was not as focused as I should have been, and a fairly simple procedure became complicated and, in fact, unsuccessful. It was during this time that I realized the importance of the biathlete type approach in what we do. Perhaps your day is not quite that complicated or perhaps you don't feel rushed. If this is the case, then I congratulate you. Still, I suspect that are days when you are doing several things at once, juggling patient care, and maybe even image interpretation. The ability to both multi-task, generate the mental toughness and stamina that you need to do everything, and at the same time be able to stop, slow down, take deep breaths and really focus is extremely important.

The more I think about this, the more I think it is a very apt description for what we do. Perhaps some of us would be successful biathletes, and perhaps some successful biathletes would be successful interventional radiologists. In either case, it is something to consider when performing interventional.

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