Melissa Fowler, your hiking companion, is a 37-year-old woman who was climbing up onto a large boulder when she lost her grip and slid backwards down it. She dropped the last few inches and fell over when she hit the ground. While still on the ground, she immediately complains of a painful right ankle, saying it twisted when she landed. It is 10:30 am; you immediately offer to help and she consents.

On examination, you find that the only physical signs of injury are large abrasions on the front part of both lower legs and a swollen, tender, right ankle.

Melissa says she was climbing to take a picture when she lost her grip. She says there wasn’t anything else that contributed to the incident. She takes allergy medication to relieve a pollen allergy and a daily multivitamin. She says she doesn’t have any other allergies or medications. Besides the allergy, she has no other current medical issues. She ate breakfast two hours ago and urinated without issue about an hour ago.

She has no difficulty in discussing the event with you and understands it is about an hour’s hike away from the trailhead. She knows who she is and the time of day. Her pulse rate is 82 and her pulse is strong and regular. Her respiratory rate is 18 and she is breathing normally. Her skin is pink, warm, and a bit sweaty.

You suspect she has a sprained ankle and scraped her legs on the face of the boulder. You have her lay down for a bit to rest, wrap the ankle with a supportive bandage, apply a cold pack, and elevate the leg. You treat her abrasions and apply dressings and bandages to both legs.

After 30 minutes, her condition has not changed. Because she is able to walk with the aid of a walking stick, you decide to go back to the trailhead, taking your time to do it safely.

While hiking with the troop, one of the troop leaders is not looking too well. He is pale, sweating heavily, and his pace has gotten increasingly slower over the hike. Concerned, you have the troop stop for a water break.

You inquire as to how he is feeling and ask for his consent to check him out, which he agrees to. He is having difficulty breathing and his chest feels tight. He felt fine when the hike began at 9 am, but about 30 minutes in he began feeling out of breath. It is now 10:30 and he shared that his chest began to feel tight about 20 minutes ago. The weather is cool, around 60 degrees – but is slowly warming up and you are hiking in bright sunshine with little shade. This is a backpacking trip, so everyone is carrying a full pack with all their gear, food, and water.

On examination he is pale, his skin is cool and damp to the touch. He is covered in sweat. His breathing is shallow and quick at a rate of 26 and when you check his pulse manually you find it is rapid and fast at 120 beats per minute.

He says he felt fine at the beginning of the hike, he does not take any medications regularly. He has no history of any medical conditions. He ate a full breakfast around 8 am and urinated before leaving home to meet the troop.

What do you suspect?

What would you do?

Is this Go Fast or Go Slow?

Write your own scenario and document it to share at the next class.