Quick Guide to Diagnosing Heart Blocks!

Heart Blocks can be difficult to interpret on the ECG. One easy way to interpret these dysrhythmias is to focus on the P-R Interval. The P-R Interval is the area on the ECG tracing that represents the impulse delay at the Atrioventricular Junction (Node). This is where the Heart Blocks originate.

Most Paramedics have no difficulty in recognizing that the dysrhythmia is some type of heart block, but they have difficulty in interpreting which type of heart block. This method should make it easier to interpret the specific heart block.

After recognition that you have some type of heart block:

**Step One:** Is the P-R interval constant or inconsistent?

Explanation: is every P-R interval the same measurement (constant) or does the P-R interval change with every R-R interval (inconsistent).

If the dysrhythmia’s P-R Interval is **CONSTANT**: the block is either **First Degree** or **Second-Degree type II**.

If the dysrhythmia’s P-R Interval is **INCONSISTENT**: the block is either **Second Degree Type I (Wenchebach)** or **Third Degree (Complete) heart block**.

You have now eliminated two of the four possibilities.

**Step Two:** If the P-R Interval is **CONSTANT**: are there extra P waves or missing QRS complexes.

If **NO**: First Degree Block  
If **Yes**: Second Degree Type II Block

If the P-R Interval is **INCONSISTENT**: is the overall rhythm regular or irregular?

If **Irregular**: Second Degree Type I Block  
If **Regular**: Third Degree Block
Is the P-R Interval Consistent or Inconsistent?

- **YES**
  - First Degree or Second Degree Type II
  - Are there extra P Waves (or missing QRS’s)?
    - **YES**
      - Second Degree Type II
    - **NO**
      - First Degree Block

- **NO**
  - Second Degree Type I or Third Degree
  - Is the Rhythm Regular or Irregular?
    - **Regular**
    - **Irregular**
      - Third Degree
      - Second Degree Type I

The remaining characteristics of the dysrhythmia are irrelevant. Through the process of elimination, you have interpreted the Heart Block without using the other characteristics. Often the other characteristics have an adverse influence on the interpretation. You only need two steps to master heart blocks!