

Pacemaker, Ross Compton

If you woke up to the smell of smoke, what would you do? Immediately run out the door? Pack a bag? Maybe investigate the source of the smell? You probably wouldn't be worried about the things you have on you, like the watch you wear to track your sleep habits. Or the devices inside you, like an insulin pump or a pacemaker.

Ross Compton didn't think about these things when he scrambled for whatever clothes and belongings he could find before breaking his bedroom window with his cane. His only thoughts were getting out of his burning house and calling for help.

The fire department was there quickly and put out the fire. Then the police showed up, combing through what was left of his now-charred home. Accidental house fires often have one point of origin, or a single location where something caught on fire and quickly spread to other objects. But this fire seemed to have started in multiple places, which points to arson. The police reached the conclusion that Ross had set this fire himself. He probably just wanted the insurance money, but how can they prove it was him? The police were stuck and trying to find more answers.

There was gasoline on his clothes, sure, but that could have been spilled at the gas station. They needed something better. Something more concrete. Most of the physical evidence is now charred or ash where his house used to be.

Well, what if something on Ross could tell us where he'd been? Wouldn't it be great if criminals wore body cams? That would certainly make the paperwork easier.

Did he have some kind of Fitbit? That thing on your wrist that catches your heart rate. Those things are like mobile lie detectors...Hey, wait...didn't this guy have a pacemaker?

A pacemaker is an implanted device near the heart. It's designed to give the heart a slight shock when it detects an irregular rhythm. This detection requires a minimal level of computing power, but it also has the ability to store and send you or your doctor records of its use. It's like if your heart had access to WiFi and the ability to tell you, "Hey, this is what I did this week. Wasn't Wednesday a doozy?"

Could a pacemaker even have the proof they're looking for? Would they be able to even access this data? The police decided to give it a shot and filed a warrant for Ross Compton's pacemaker data. The judge granted it, and Ross handed over the electronic data stored on his pacemaker. But...is this an issue of privacy or doctor/patient privilege? I know there are other regulations for some electronic devices like phones. Apple has had some issues recently where it won't give out Apple IDs even in criminal cases because that sets an unnerving precedent. So, where does a pacemaker fall in this? Is it a healthcare/HIPAA rule? Or a wireless device rule like phones?

When the hospital released Ross's pacemaker records, it showed his heart had a normal rhythm at the time he said was packing a bag and breaking his window. To the police, this meant he was guilty. I mean, who in their right mind would be this calm while packing a bag and jumping out of a burning building?

Each pacemaker is implanted for different reasons to serve different functions. So, people with arrhythmia and an adrenal disorder may not show elevated heart rates in times of stress (you know, like a house fire). The very point of a pacemaker is to correct abnormalities within the heart, so its very

existence becomes problematic and leads to more questions. Why was his pacemaker implanted? Did he have any additional health issues that would interfere with the pacemaker data? Would Ross even show an elevated heart rate in times of stress? These fall solidly under HIPAA regulations, so they're going to need to be answered by his doctor with a warrant. But...where do those requests end?

Ross was set to go to trial in May of this year, which was postponed because of the ever-present COVID pandemic. Unfortunately, this delay in his trial meant in the additional time spent waiting, Ross Compton passed away, leaving his case up in the air. So, the questions on this topic have no answer yet. The law says his estate can complete trial on his behalf, but that usually means a lot of legal fees for a case that they may not be able to pay.

Privacy issues in the US are complicated, especially in relation to computing tech. They don't always have a nice, neat, cut-and-dried answer, and unfortunately, the judicial system often works significantly slower than advances in technology. In Ross's case, it moved so slowly, he won't be able to see the result of his own case.

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Honorable Mention Source:

[*Apple ID and Government Warrant Details*](#)