

Should You Have a Home Defibrillator?

by Robin Manougian

Facts About Sudden Cardiac Arrest (SCA):

- At least 250,000 people in the United States die every year from SCA. In fact, more people die from SCA than from breast cancer, prostate cancer, AIDS, house fires, hand guns, and traffic accidents combined.
- A surprising 50 percent of sudden deaths in men and 63 percent in women, occur in people who had no prior symptoms of heart disease. While SCA can result from undetected heart disease, certainly SCA can also result from drowning, electrocution, choking, and trauma.
- Nearly 80 percent of all heart attacks occur at home – and fewer than 5 percent survive.

What is a Sudden Cardiac Arrest?

According to the American Heart Association, every year 460,000 deaths result in the United States from Sudden Cardiac Arrest. Sudden Cardiac Arrest (SCA) occurs when the lower chambers of the heart (the ventricles) suddenly stop beating normally and begin ventricular fibrillation (VF). VF is a chaotic heart rhythm, or quivering of the heart muscle, that prevents the heart from effectively pumping blood. If this condition is not corrected immediately, death is possible in as little as ten minutes. A defibrillator is the only known device/technique that stops the chaotic electrical heart activity and allows the heart to re-pace itself to a normal rhythm.

Increasing the Chances for Survival

For the best chance of survival, a shock should be delivered within five minutes. While a defibrillator will not save every SCA victim, it is thought that many more lives could be saved if this device were available. For every minute that goes by without defibrillation, a victim's chances of survival decrease by seven to ten percent and typically after 10 minutes, survival is unlikely.

While paramedics and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) personnel can respond to SCA emergencies, the reality is that most cardiac arrests occur in the home where it can take as many as six minutes for help to arrive. Add to those six minutes:

- The time that may have elapsed between a person going into cardiac arrest and someone else recognizing the symptoms.
- The time it takes to call for help/explain the emergency to a 911 operator.
- The time it takes for emergency personnel to arrive and assess the victim's state/emergency.
- The time necessary to deliver a shock using a defibrillator.

With all these points to take into consideration, as well as other potential delays, it is clear why less than five percent of victims survive.

Sudden Cardiac Arrest often strikes without warning. According to the American Heart Association, as many as 40,000 lives could be saved if defibrillators were more widely available to be used in the event of SCA. To give the victim the best chance for survival, you need to be prepared. On November 13, 2000, former President Bill Clinton signed the Cardiac Arrest Survival Act. This represents the most comprehensive "Good Samaritan" legislation ever established which provides complete immunity from civil litigation for all people using an Automated External Defibrillator (AED).

If a defibrillator is to be used within a community association, it is highly encouraged that the Board and management of the community first consult with the Association's attorney regarding use and liability. Please see refer also to the article in this issue regarding defibrillator liability, 'A "Clear!" Look at the State of the Law Surrounding Defibrillators', by Colleen Gillis Snow.

Obtaining a Defibrillator

A variety of manufacturers market AED devices for airlines, workplaces, schools, home use and communities. Some units require a prescription. Price points vary from \$1,000 to \$3,000 and this article is not designed to promote any one manufacturer's product. Please contact each company individually for suitability and pricing information. You might also find comparison information helpful at www.aedsurvivors.org.

- Philips Corporation/HeartStart Defibrillator, 866-333-4246 or www.HeartStart.com
- Access CardioSystems, (866) 238-3631 or www.accesscardio.com
- Cardiac Science/PowerHeart, 888.274.3342 or www.cardiacscience.com
- Zoll AED, 800-834-7232 or www.zoll.us
- Welch Allyn, AED10 and AED20, 800-535-6663 or www.welchallyn.com
- Heartsine Technologies/Samaritan AED, 866.HRT.SINE or www.heartsine.com

Robin Manougian is an insurance agent with the John Manougian Insurance Agency, Inc. in Silver Spring, Maryland, and is also Co-chair of the Chapter's Publications Committee.