



Schools buying heart device

Defibrillators bring peace of mind to many districts

By Michael D. Clark
Enquirer staff writer

Keith White smiled at his wife, Ingrid, holding her close while moving to the rhythm of the band at an Immaculate Heart of Mary school dance.

But within seconds, his previously healthy heart lost its own beat, convulsing wildly and dropping him, dying, to the dance floor.

Bystanders at the September event sprang into action, using the Anderson Township school's newly purchased automated external defibrillator (AED) - a computerized device that delivers an electrical shock to restore normal heart rhythm.

"It's amazing that such a device could jump-start my heart and bring me back to life," the 53-year-old father of two says. "It's a miracle."

Such potential lifesavers are now available at an increasing number of schools throughout Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky. More than 120 defibrillators have been installed in area schools - almost all within the last 18 months - with many purchased through government discounts using either school money, private donations or both.

Officials say Ohio is among the leaders nationwide in the trend for installing the life-saving devices in schools.

School and emergency officials say they are one of the best advances in school safety since the fire extinguisher.

Teachers who have been trained to use them praise their simplicity, especially the voice-guided instructions.

"It's incredible. These machines make it so much easier to help someone because they work with you through the process. The only thing that is still intimidating is confronting the reality of the situation," says Derek Furnish, a Spanish teacher at Villa Madonna School in Villa Hills.

1200 Deaths a day

Health officials estimate that 1,200 people die every day in America from sudden cardiac arrest. Mary Newman, executive director of the nonprofit National Center for Early Defibrillation, said 45 percent of victims survive if a defibrillator is used within five minutes.

Portable defibrillators have been standard equipment for emergency medical service teams and in many police cruisers in recent years and are an increasingly common fixture in airports, commercial airliners, shopping malls, health clubs, hotels, cruise ships, trains, sporting events and businesses.

Ohio and Northern Kentucky schools are among the nation's leaders in getting them, Newman says.



Keith White of Anderson Twp., center, holds a defibrillator like the one that saved his life. Sr. Carole Temming and Tom Riemar of the Anderson Fire Department were there when White collapsed.

SUDDEN CARDIAC ARREST

- Sudden cardiac arrest - when the victim is unconscious and has no pulse as the heart rapidly beats out of rhythm - is one of the leading causes of death in America for men and women 35 years and older. Health officials estimate that it kills about 1,200 people every day.

- Almost half of cardiac-arrest victims survive when an automated external defibrillators is applied within five minutes. CPR, without a defibrillator, saves about 7 percent of victims.

SCHOOLS WITH AEDS

An informal survey by the Enquirer and information from manufacturers show that these public school districts have defibrillators in some buildings:

- Hamilton County:** Mariemont, Forest Hills, Madeira, Indian Hill, Mount Healthy, Lockland, North College Hill. Considering purchases: Cincinnati, Finneytown, Princeton, St. Bernard-Elmwood Place.
- Butler County:** Lakota, Fairfield. Considering: Hamilton, Ross.
- Warren County:** Mason, Lebanon.
- Clermont County:** Milford, Clermont Northeastern, New Richmond, West Clermont.
- Northern Kentucky:** Kenton County, Campbell County.

In June, Ohio Gov. Bob Taft signed legislation that made \$2.5 million of the state's tobacco lawsuit settlement money available to put the devices in 5,000 Ohio schools, and last week, a plan announcing how schools can apply for the funding was announced. Kentucky has programs in place offering special purchasing discounts for public and private schools.

Newman says the tobacco settlement money put Ohio ahead of the handful of others, such as New York, Illinois and Nevada, which have

passed laws requiring defibrillators on school grounds, but offer no state funding.

She says many schools nationwide are buying the devices at the grass-roots level, and tapping into alumni donations or booster clubs.

Lower prices; better technology (including recorded voice assistance); and so-called "good Samaritan" laws, which exempt someone from litigation stemming from use of a defibrillator, have spurred sales of the units, Newman says. Within five years, she predicts, every American school will have one.

Training essential

But merely hanging the device on the wall isn't enough. Training is essential, says Laura Randall, executive director of Northern Kentucky Emergency Medical Services and one of the region's top defibrillator trainers.

The EMS veteran, who is also the deputy coroner for Campbell County, gives high marks to area schools with defibrillators for the level of training and preparedness.

The lack of proper training can have deadly consequences. In 2003, a Georgia high school football player went into cardiac arrest while working out in his school's gym. A portable defibrillator was only steps away, but it was never used because a school staff member couldn't figure out how to operate it. CPR was administered, but the teen died hours later.

Peace of Mind

School officials say the presence of defibrillators gives them additional peace of mind, especially at crowded athletic events with more adults than young students.

"On any given high school football game night, we may have 5,000 people in the football stands, and that is the size of a small town," says Stu Eversole, athletic director for Lakota schools. "The odds are when we use it, we won't be using it on a young person but somebody older."

Randall likes to cheer on nervous trainees by assuring them from her own experience that knowing how to use one is worthwhile. "There is no better feeling than saving a life," Randall says.

Tom Riemar knows that feeling. The Anderson Township assistant fire chief was at the school dance where Keith White collapsed in cardiac arrest. Riemar and others immediately began performing CPR on White.

"Right away, someone was shouting 'Get the AED! Get the AED!' and somebody from the school ran for it," he recalls.

The defibrillator was attached to White, and he was shocked once, and CPR continued until a pulse appeared. White began to speak as he regained consciousness.

"I'm in total awe on how the situation played out. The defibrillator played a key role."

E-mail mclark@enquirer.com