Campaign is launched for more life-saving kit

July 13, 2015

At any point today in the Portsmouth area someone may have a cardiac arrest – where the heart suddenly stops pumping blood around the body. And their chances of survival could be less than five per cent.

But a relatively simple device – a defibrillator, which ‘shocks’ the heart back into action – could increase the chances of survival by as much as 50 per cent.

There is a shortage of defibrillators in Portsmouth and surrounding areas – and particularly publicly-accessible devices that anybody can use in times of emergency.

By getting more defibrillators in busy public places, including schools, shopping centres, railway and bus stations, gyms, workplaces and community centres, the chances of surviving a cardiac arrest could drastically go up.

In cities that have embraced defibrillators – such as Seattle in the US – the chances of survival have increased to almost 60 per cent.

Throwing his weight behind The News campaign is Matt Tanner, who is only here today because of a defibrillator.

The 43-year-old suffered several cardiac arrests and a heart attack in his home in London Road, North End.
His wife Kelly, 42, carried out CPR, until ambulance crews arrived and were able to use a defibrillator on him.

Mr Tanner was lucky that paramedics were able to get to him in time to restart his heart, but not everyone is so fortunate.

As a result of the incident, Mr Tanner’s workplace, Formaplex Limited, has invested in defibrillators for its factories in Cosham, Havant and Horndean.

He said: ‘It’s fantastic. With what happened to me, the key was how quickly everyone responded and the paramedics picking the correct equipment and also my wife giving CPR. Having a defibrillator on site now is a fantastic thing. If anyone has a cardiac arrest on site, it’s not going to be too long to help someone – you are talking about a minute or thirty seconds.

‘It’s a critical time. The more defibrillators we can get, the better.’

According to figures held by South Central Ambulance Service, south-east Hampshire has about 60 to 70 defibrillators on its database.

The majority are privately managed in schools and doctors’ surgeries and although useful, cannot usually be accessed by the public, especially at weekends or evenings.

According to the Heartsafe organisation, the nearest publicly accessible defibrillators are at Petersfield, the Isle of Wight and Southampton.

Officials at Scas, which runs a separate database, say there are a handful of publicly-accessible defibrillators in the Portsmouth area, but many more are needed.

Steve Cartwright, who looks after publicly accessible defibrillators for Scas, said: ‘We desperately need defibrillators everywhere.

‘It’s particularly light for publicly accessible defibrillators in the Portsmouth area.

‘We would like to have a defibrillator within 300 yards.’

Let the ambulance service know about devices

SAVING lives could be as easy as sending an email to the ambulance service.

Part of the issue, aside from no single definitive database for defibrillator locations, is there may be some defibrillators out there that are not on the paramedics’ radar.

Steve Cartwright, of Scas, said it was crucial that any organisation that has bought a defibrillator lets the ambulance service know.

He said: ‘When you call for an ambulance and give us the address, it flags up on our system where the nearest defibrillator is.’

He said doubling the number of defibrillators on the Scas database could save lives.

‘It’s got to increase the chances of surviving a cardiac arrest,’ said Mr Cartwright.

‘I can’t say survivability would go up in direct proportion to the number of defibrillators, but the survivability has to go up with more defibrillators.’

Meanwhile, Trudie Lobban MBE, founder of the Arrhythmia Alliance, which is campaigning for more defibrillators and for the devices to be on a par with fire extinguishers in terms of public safety, is backing The News campaign.

She said: ‘Today across the UK, up to 250 people will be struck down by sudden cardiac arrest and less
than 20 will survive – in many other places across the world more than 100 of these people would survive and continue to live their lives.’

- To let us know you have a defibrillator, e-mail the ambulance service at cfr@scas.nhs.uk and News reporter jeff.travis@thenews.co.uk

You can also back the campaign by tweeting #newsheartbeat.

The ambulance service has a mobile app showing the locations of defibrillators.
Look for AED Locator UK.

What is a cardiac arrest and how can you help?

A CARDIAC arrest occurs when the heart suddenly stops pumping blood.

Someone who is having a cardiac arrest will suddenly lose consciousness and stop breathing or stop breathing normally.

Unless immediately treated by CPR this always leads to death within minutes.

A heart attack is a sudden interruption to the blood supply to part of the heart muscle. It is likely to cause chest pain and permanent damage to the heart. The heart is still sending blood around the body and the person remains conscious and is still breathing.

The most common cause of a cardiac arrest is a life-threatening abnormal heart rhythm called ventricular fibrillation.

VF can sometimes be corrected by giving an electric shock through the chest wall, by using a device called a defibrillator.

Immediate CPR can be used to keep oxygen circulating around the body until a defibrillator can be used and/or until the ambulance arrives.

The cost of an AED including a secure box is £1,850 excluding fitting charges.

Scas can provide funding assistance to interested businesses and organisations by directing them to charities, grants and community fundraising schemes.

The trust can provide training. Visit southcentralambulance.nhs.uk/campaigns/startaheart. The Community Heartbeat Trust can also help and have a scheme to equip public phone boxes with defibrillators. Call 0845 86 277 39 or go to communityheartbeat.org.uk.