

Snohomish County

Pat Cook drives a community's Public Access Defibrillation Program

Eleven years ago while teaching fifth grade at Mt. Pilchuck Elementary School (Washington), a tragic event occurred. During one of my lectures, the school's physical education teacher brought an unconscious third grade student into my classroom. The boy had gone into cardiac arrest as a result of complications from a seizure.

CPR was performed until Snohomish County Fire Protection District #8 (SCFPD#8) personnel arrived. They were able to restart the boy's heart, but critical time had elapsed without defibrillation. The boy survived, but with a devastating brain injury that would result in him being confined to a wheelchair for the rest of his life, along with needing extensive rehabilitation and constant care.

In 2000, I decided to join the Snohomish County Fire Protection District #8. While going through my EMT training, we used Philips HeartStart Defibrillators. It was amazing how easy these devices were to use. After doing some research, I discovered that this type of automated external defibrillator was developed specifically for the minimally-trained layperson. My research continued on sudden cardiac arrest (SCA) in school-aged children and I was astonished by the frequency of deaths that were occurring in our nation's schools. It was even more

amazing to discover that four SCA events had recently occurred in the Puget Sound region, with three of the students dying and one surviving, but with a devastating brain injury.

A light bulb went on in my head. I decided to implement a public access defibrillation program in my school district to protect the lives of our students, staff, faculty and visitors from the tragic effects of SCA. The goal was to place two defibrillators at our high school, one at each of our two middle schools, and one at each of our six elementary schools.

Funding The Plan

I approached my school district superintendent with my plan. Although he thought it was a great idea, he wasn't able to help financially due to limited district funds. I then decided to go to the community of Lake Stevens for financial support, beginning with our local newspaper and then moving on to the regional paper, to bring awareness of SCA in school-aged children in hopes of generating funds. A few Seattle TV news stations picked up on the story and helped with my cause. Funds started to trickle in from around the state, from our local service organizations and community members.

We needed forty thousand dollars to purchase the defibrillators for our schools. Money was coming into a fund that my district had set up, but not at the rate that

I was hoping for. Fortunately, the father of the young man that I had done CPR on called me and expressed his willingness to help. He purchased the first defibrillator and two more were purchased with the funds raised, and then an anonymous donor purchased an additional two.

The Right Defibrillators

After evaluating several defibrillators on the market, I decided the Philips HeartStart FR2 was clearly the superior product. When it comes to defibrillation technology, Philips leads the pack. The Philips HeartStart FR2 is safe and easy to use. My philosophy is to buy the best product that money can buy. That's why I recommended that our school district purchase the HeartStart FR2.

Deployment

Not knowing the legalities of placing defibrillators in public places I came across my first obstacle. I thought all you had to do was acquire the funds, buy the defibrillators, train the teachers and install the defibrillators. Little did I know that Washington State has specific guidelines for automated external defibrillator placement. Everett Medic One Foundation was then contacted and they were able to help me with the paperwork and specifics of implementing a public access defibrillation program.

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Training

Along with trainers from the Everett Medic One Foundation, a core group of teachers and support staff were trained in each of the three secondary buildings. All of these teachers and support staff donated their own time to be trained.

Toward the end of the school year, the young student I had performed CPR on passed away. The family only found it fitting that they purchase the remaining five defibrillators for the school district in their sons memory. The training was completed in the remaining buildings by Snohomish County Fire Protection District #8 and goes on to this day. In less than two years, my goal was accomplished.

Our program received an amazing amount of support from the community. At first community members thought SCA was an old person's illness, but through education, they learned it can happen to anyone, anywhere, at anytime. In the past year, two more students in the county have suffered SCA, one died and one survived, but with devastating brain injuries.

We've come a long way, but we still have a lot of work to do to make defibrillators more readily available in our schools. After implementing our public access defibrillation program, other school districts have contacted me about helping them. The first words out of my mouth were, "I do not work for Philips, nor do I get paid to promote their product. But I highly recommend Philips HeartStart Defibrillators."

When it comes to defibrillation technology, Philips leads the pack. The Philips HeartStart FR2 is safe and easy to use. In fact, it is virtually impossible to shock someone who is not suffering SCA.

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Snohomish County Fire Protection District #8

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