

Public heart shock scheme success

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Terry Blake tells how his life was saved

A scheme to provide defibrillators in public places in England and Wales should be extended, researchers say.

A total of 132 people were saved between 1999 and 2005 because they could be quickly "shocked" at the scene when their hearts stopped beating.

The Cardiff University researchers said the numbers may seem small, but it was highly unlikely any would have survived without the devices being on hand.

The British Heart Foundation said they were "delighted" with the results.

The prognosis for people who have a cardiac arrest outside hospital is generally very poor.

Sudden cardiac arrest is a leading cause of death in adults and the most common cause is heart disease.

If you have a defibrillator you can give a shock very quickly and it doesn't matter who gives it
Dr Michael Colquhoun, study leader

The British Heart Foundation began to fund public defibrillators in the 1990s but the scheme expanded in 1999 when the government placed 700 devices in high-risk places.

It is now commonplace for airports, train stations and sports centres to have defibrillators on site where members of staff are trained to use them.

The devices are also issued to volunteers trained as "community first responders" as they may be able to reach victims faster than conventional ambulance crews.

Similar schemes exist in Northern Ireland and the Scottish Government is looking at the provision of the devices after a government committee recently recommended their use.

Survival

Dr Michael Colquhoun and colleagues found shocks were given to 735 victims over the six-year period - either by a member of the public or trained volunteers.

Return of circulation was achieved in a third of them with 18% surviving, their report in the journal Resuscitation showed.

If the device was immediately available on site, 30% of victims were saved.

The chances of success were also much higher if the cardiac arrest was witnessed by someone and resuscitation with CPR was done straightaway.

Dr Colquhoun said the figures may seem small but the prognosis after a cardiac arrest is poor.

"If you have a defibrillator you can give a shock very quickly and it doesn't matter who gives it - anyone can press the buttons, they are very user friendly.

"This is something the government really did get right.

"No other country has the same network of defibrillators."

He said the scheme had been particularly successful in leisure centres where there was a high rate of survival after someone had been shocked at the scene.

Colin Elding, chest pain programme manager for the British Heart Foundation said they had been funding public defibrillators and training people to use them for many years.

"This is excellent news, absolutely wonderful and we're delighted."

He added they would like to see more devices in rural areas where ambulances may take some time to arrive.

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