

First Aid with a Defibrillator

Odysso does a test...

Every minute counts in the event of a Sudden Cardiac Arrest (SCA). A lot of time can pass even until the Emergency Services arrive. Automatic External Defibrillators (AED) are therefore now found in many public places, so that, in the case of an emergency lay people can also help. They say even a child can use them. In Stuttgart's pedestrian zone Odysso put one to the test. A SCA victim we of course brought with us – even if it wasn't a real one! Will passers-by trust themselves enough to save a life with a defib?

Always ready to help?

Emergency doctor Dr Stefan Gromer chaperoned the experiment and explains the workings of a defibrillator. "It is a device with which you can save someone's life and that is to the life of someone who's heart has gone into ventricular fibrillation (VF). That is a type of cardiac arrest. The device is very user-friendly – anyone can use it. You only need to press a button. Then the device will with you instructions. It tells you everything you need to do. You can't do anything wrong." Most people see things completely differently when it comes to 'spontaneous life-saving' Passers-by tell us they would 'use that but I need to catch a train' or 'the first-aid course I did to get my driving licence [which is compulsory in Germany] was a long time ago!' 'I'm scared I'd break the gentleman!' or 'Sorry, I would but I need to change my son's nappy!'



The Talking Lifesaver



So after a dozen or so hopeless attempts, we find a brave volunteer. He uses the Defib and follows the instructions: 'Call for medical assistance' and 'Remove clothing from patient's chest to expose bare skin'. Every minute counts now – as Dr Gromer knows from experience. "VF

is is type cardiac arrest, that means the heart isn't pumping any blood out – and when blood isn't pumped we have no oxygen in our organs. A very important organ is naturally our brain. Here serious damage can occur" relatively quickly when it is starved of oxygen.

After the electrode pads have been removed and peeled from the liner, the instructions say to apply them to the patient's chest. Then the device analyses the patient's heart rhythm through the electrodes. During this the patient shouldn't be touched as that can interfere with the measurement of

the heart rhythm. Pressing the orange button delivers the shock that will bring the Heart back into the correct pattern. Because in this case we're just doing an experiment we've bypassed the CPR which would normally be carried out.

Winning Over Reluctant First-Aiders

Melanie Storch from the Björn-Steiger Foundation is campaigning for the improvement of First Aid in Germany. She watched our test with mixed feelings. Those asked to take part in the experiment were very hesitant but despite that Melanie Storch hopes that this isn't purely a German problem: "It is that way however. We would like it to be like it is in other countries – for example the USA or Scandinavia. First Aid is routinely taught there. First in primary school, then in high school or in companies. People there are much more confident in putting what they have learned into practice than the Germans." The results of our Defib-test were that inside 90 minutes five passers-by were willing to help. Our 'heart patient' confirms this hesitancy. "As a 'victim' I noticed that people were very reluctant get involved in the whole thing. There is an urgent need for more information which First-Aid courses can obviously provide. People's lives could be saved - above all, if there were more Emergency Stations with these AED 's."

What is clear is that an automatic external defibrillator is easy to use. Whoever trusts themselves enough to use one can save a life. The experiment showed however that First-Aid in Germany is itself a patient which urgently needs help!

Frank Wittig

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