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Putting heart-saving devices in the right places

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PETALING JAYA: AED isn't an acronym that is familiar to most Malaysians.

Yet, Automated External Defibrillators play a big role in saving lives, so cardiologists are of the view that there should be greater accessibility to these devices in public spaces.

Health Ministry Cardiology Services deputy head Datuk Dr Asri Ranga Abdullah Ramaiah said AEDs should be more widely available especially at locations with a higher risk of cardiac events such as sports arenas, gymnasiums, schools and airports.

He said these devices are essential for immediate life-saving intervention in cases of cardiac arrest, so it should be placed in locations that are easily accessible, ideally with clear signage and lighting.

On Saturday, Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad said that the survival rate in cases of sudden cardiac arrest is low, with less than 1% of victims surviving if no action is taken.

He said that AEDs are life-saving devices that can increase the survival rate because 70% of such cases occur outside of hospitals,



Crucial help:

The correct way to place an AED pad being demonstrated on a doll.

— SHAARI CHEMAT/
The Star

where the time between the collapse and defibrillation is crucial.

Dr Asri Ranga, when contacted, emphasised on hands-on training and familiarity in the use of AED and also in providing cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR).

"It is important to start CPR and AED training from a young age. Primary schools should start holding introduction courses, perhaps in Year 6 and further enhanced in secondary school for greater understanding. Broader first aid training can help individuals assess the situation and act in a calm and measured manner during a health emergency," he said.

Dr Asri Ranga said while AEDs are designed to be user-friendly with built-in voice prompts and

visual guides that enable even untrained individuals to use them accordingly, he cautioned that the misapplication of the device could potentially cause harm or delay proper care for the patient.

"These are cases when someone unfamiliar with an AED uses it incorrectly such as shocking a person who is not in need of defibrillation or is in a non-cardiac emergency."

However, he said most AEDs will analyse the heart rhythm and only recommend a shock if one is needed, thus minimising the risk of any harm.

"Hence, the potential benefits outweigh the risks. There may also be concerns about liability if an AED is used incorrectly, but if

there are laws such as the Good Samaritan Law, those acting in good faith to help are generally protected," he said.

To encourage the accessibility of AEDs at business premises and other locations, he said the government and private organisations could collaborate to subsidise the cost.

He said the price of AEDs ranging from basic to advanced models could be between RM8,000 and RM18,000.

Consultant cardiologist Dr Nor Halwani Habizal proposed that there be a policy for all new buildings to be equipped with AEDs.

However, she voiced the concern about vandalism and environmental factors that may compromise the serviceability of the device.

"While AEDs in public spaces can save lives, it must be safeguarded to ensure it is serviceable at times of need. Education is important to create awareness among the people to guard this precious life-saving device at public areas," she said.

Consultant cardiologist and electrophysiologist Dr Sathvinder Singh Gian Singh said a patient who suffers cardiac arrest has a 70% chance of survival if he is

defibrillated with an AED within the first three minutes of passing out.

He said an AED could restore or "reset" heart rhythms back to normal by delivering electric shocks.

"During cardiac arrest, for every passing minute, the survival rate declines by 10% without the intervention of an AED. This is why it is crucial to have quick accessibility to AEDs."

In the absence of an AED, he said CPR should promptly be administered.

Community leader and former Petaling Jaya Malaysian Crime Prevention Foundation chairman Eric Chew, who launched a nationwide campaign to promote the placement of AEDs in public areas several months ago, said with cases of heart disease among younger folk on the rise, he hoped the government would launch more initiatives to encourage the private sector to have AEDs at its premises.

"For a start, all pharmacies which often operate for over 12 hours daily could equip their stores with AEDs and train their staff on how to use it.

"So, in case of an emergency, help can be sought from the nearest pharmacy," he said.

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'Increase awareness of CPR and AED usage to save lives'

Public training on emergency response skills can make difference between life and death: Experts

BY HARITH KAMAL
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PETALING JAYA: Shockwaves were felt around the world on July 1 when 17-year-old Chinese badminton player Zhang Zhijie suffered a cardiac arrest and collapsed on court during a tournament in Indonesia. He died later that day.

Now, St John Ambulance of Malaysia corporate training manager Chew Hoon Ling is urging the public to learn cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and how to use a portable automated external defibrillator (AED).

"When someone collapses and stops breathing, there is a critical four-minute window to save their lives. After this, the brain begins to die from a lack of oxygen," she said.

Chew noted that tragedies such as these could be prevented if the public were equipped with CPR skills, explaining that it typically takes about five minutes to make a 999 or 911 call and 30 minutes for an ambulance to arrive, by which time it is often too late.

While CPR is vital, Chew



Chew urged people to set aside misconceptions and learn the basics of CPR as it can prevent tragedies. — ADAM AMIR HAMZAH/THESUN

highlighted that many people are unaware of the importance of AED devices, which work hand-in-hand with CPR.

"The use of an AED is critical, as survival rates with CPR alone are low, but they double or triple when an AED is used," she said.

Universiti Teknologi Malaysia Sports Innovation and Technology Centre director Dr Hadafi Fitri Mohd Latip warned that high-intensity physical sports such as badminton can be dangerous when pushed to the limits.

"Badminton is one of the most physically demanding sports,

requiring rapid directional changes, high jumps and powerful smashes. It demands significant aerobic and anaerobic energy, placing strain on the cardiovascular and muscular systems.

"Playing in poorly ventilated environments can lead to heat exhaustion and dehydration, further taxing the heart. Overtraining and inadequate recovery can also cause cumulative fatigue, increasing the risk of cardiac issues," he said.

Hadafi emphasised that survival rates for sudden cardiac arrest can increase by up to 75% with timely CPR and defibrillation.

"Preparedness is essential. In any setting - casual or professional - coaches, referees and teammates should be trained in basic life support techniques to act immediately during emergencies," he said.

Chew encouraged people to set aside misconceptions and learn the basics of CPR, as it can save lives and prevent tragedies.

"In Malaysia, many hesitate to act due to fear or discomfort with mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, leading to a drop in bystander CPR rates.

"Even if you're unwilling to perform mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, hands-only CPR, which focuses solely on chest compressions, is still effective. It's better than doing nothing. While mouth-to-mouth is preferable, chest compressions alone can still save lives," she said.

Chew urged the public to be proactive in learning life-saving skills, mentioning that St John Ambulance Malaysia's national headquarters offers free two-hour CPR and AED courses on the last Sunday of every month, except December.

"Sudden cardiac arrest can strike anyone, anywhere, at any time - even during sleep, not just from exercise or health issues.

"That's why everyone must learn CPR and AED skills. It's not enough to hear about it, one needs to practise it. By doing so, the public can make a difference between life and death and offer hope and a chance of survival."