

DEFIBRILLATOR SAVES MAN'S LIFE AT GAME

Retired surgeon and city worker use key device to revive heart attack victim.

BY MEGHANN M. CUNIFF
STAFF WRITER

When a man collapsed from a heart attack during a senior citizen basketball tournament at the San Juan Capistrano Community Center, two starkly different things saved his life: luck and technology.

A player on the opposing team who happened to be a retired heart surgeon rushed to help. And a quick-thinking city employee grabbed a seldom-used life-saving device that medical experts recommend all public places have: an automated external defibrillator.

The AED is a portable electronic device that diagnoses cardiac irregularities and treats them with electric shocks designed to help the heart re-establish its regular rhythm.

"You see them at Disneyland. You see them at Costco. You see them at the mall. You see them at Anaheim stadium," said Capt. Steve Concialdi, spokesman for the Orange County Fire Authority. "Any person can use one of these. The machine will walk you through every step."

Joe Pierantoni, a member of a team of 60- to 68-year-olds, is recovering from surgery after the April 11 incident, which occurred as two games were going on in the city gym.

"I'm recovering real well," Pierantoni said on Tuesday.

Milton Vana, the retired surgeon, performed chest compressions as community services coordinator Kipp Lyons grabbed the AED from a nearby office and attached it to Pierantoni's chest.

Players gathered around Pierantoni, shouting encouragement, said Pam Schuler, who was helping to keep score with her husband, Jim, when Pierantoni collapsed.

"I thought he'd gone," Schuler said. "I went back to Jim and I said, 'I think he's already passed.'"

It takes a few seconds for the machine to analyze the heart attack and assess the proper shock, which can seem like an eternity to a victim's loved ones, Concialdi said.

Pierantoni responded to the shocks, Lyons said.

"You could see all the color coming back," Lyons said. "You could really see his heart beating."

Medics arrived, and Schuler saw Pierantoni breathing.

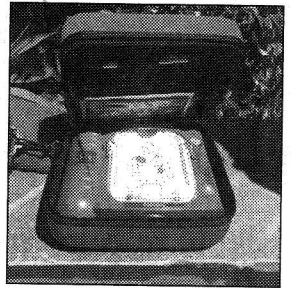
"I thought, 'That's beautiful. What a miracle,'" she said.

The community center has two automated external defibrillators; City Hall has one. The city recently spent \$1,400 to replace one at the community center.

The devices were introduced to city property in 2001, said Mike Cantor, San Juan Capistrano's emergency services manager.

Pierantoni said he's grateful for the aid he received at the community center and at Mission Hospital.

"Those surgeons there, they really know their business," Pierantoni said. "I was very fortunate."



MEGHANN M. CUNIFF, STAFF

This defibrillator is at the San Juan Capistrano Community Center.

USING AN AED

Automated external defibrillators are user-friendly devices that untrained bystanders can use to help save the life of someone having sudden cardiac arrest. Here are steps in the process:

- Before using an AED, check for water near the person who needs help. If necessary, move the person to a dry area before delivering shocks.
 - Turn on the AED's power. The device will give you step-by-step instructions on a screen and through voice prompts.
 - Check that the wires from the electrodes are connected to the AED. Make sure no one is touching the person, and then press the AED's "analyze" button. Stay clear while the machine checks the person's heart rhythm.
 - If a shock is needed, the AED will let you know when to deliver it. Stand clear and make sure others are clear before you push the "shock" button.
 - Start or resume CPR until emergency medical help arrives or until the person begins to move.
- Source: National Institutes of Health