

February is American Heart Month – Learn CPR

You are enjoying a family get-together with your extended family when your 62 year old mother quietly complains of feeling flu-like and breathless. She decides to retire into the den to rest and as you escort her, she collapses. You immediately yell for someone to call 911 but you sit by her side and wait helplessly because you do not know how to perform CPR.

February is “American Heart Month” and it is a good time to be reminded that many sudden cardiac deaths can be prevented by quick bystander response – calling 911 and then initiating CPR. According to the American Heart Association website, the most important link in the “chain of survival” from a sudden cardiac arrest is the layperson. Because two-thirds of sudden deaths due to coronary heart disease happen outside of the hospital, it is up to family, friends, neighbors, and community members to help save the lives of those around them.

Several weeks ago at the Fort Healthcare CPR-AED/First Aid training class, a group of seven men and women shared why they had signed up to take the class. Of the group, four were required to take the class through their employer, one couple wanted to meet the requirement for a potential new business, and one woman needed to become certified to meet a Girl Scout leader requirement.

Missing from the group were general community members who wanted to be proactive in taking care of those around them. New parents and grandparents, family of cardiac patients or diabetics are groups that should be represented in each training session but that does not always happen. Many feel that if they are able to call 911 – they need not become involved in any hands-on care. However, data shows that if something can be started right away – chest compressions and rescue breathing - there is a much higher probability that the victim will survive. And it is important to note, that the victim is most often a family member or friend.

Early defibrillation, which is administered through an automated external defibrillator (AED), is another critical link in the “chain of survival”. AEDs are now located in many public locations and the American Heart course includes training on how to use this device. According to the American Heart website, a sudden cardiac arrest victim who isn’t defibrillated within eight to ten minutes has virtually no chance of survival.

Dawn Blanton, a practicing EMT and paramedic who coordinates and teaches the American Heart Association classes at Fort HealthCare, states that “I wish it were the EMTs or Emergency Departments that saved lives in these cases but it is those who witness the cardiac arrests that have the most critical role in determining survival.” In order to serve the community, Blanton describes several courses that fit a variety of different needs. “Fort HealthCare offers the American Heart Family and Friends course which is a non-credentialed course that allows participants to practice the steps needed to save a life – no tests, just some great practice time”. The class fee is \$5 and lasts 2-3 hours and is offered every quarter. For those who would like a more in-depth course, Blanton suggests the Heartsaver course which introduces the AED and is a 3-4 hour commitment. In either case, the skills taught help to save lives. One recent Heartsaver course graduate stated that it was an excellent and interesting course - between Blanton’s real life examples from the field and the newly revamped American Heart literature, the course was simple to understand and even enjoyable.

For a nominal fee and a short time commitment, give a gift to those you love and become trained in CPR/AED. For more information about Fort HealthCare’s CPR/AED courses, please visit their website at www.FortHealthCare.com or call Dawn Blanton at (920)568-5248.