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Err on the side of caution

If you are not sure whether to use an AED on a victim of cardiac arrest, use it

Letter from Dr Dana Elliott Srither

IT IS disheartening to hear that the life of a husband and father was lost during a golf game ("Golfer's death a 'misadventure'", July 13). It is more disheartening to me, for two reasons, to hear that the country club staff did not use an automated external defibrillator (AED).

It was said at the coroner's inquiry that the club's action plan called for the device to be used only when a casualty is not breathing or has no detectable pulse, and that staff had detected a "weak pulse" from the victim.

Firstly, the AED is the key link in the survival of any victim of cardiac arrest. This has been clearly shown by the marked increase in the survival of out-of-hospital cardiac arrest victims.

Defibrillation works best when the victim's heart is in ventricular fibrillation (VF). (Editor's note: When there is uncoordinated contraction of the cardiac muscle.)

This leads to my second point: The country club missed their opportunity to protect themselves.

The AED should be capable of recording the victim's electrocardiogram (ECG). If the ECG indicates VF, the AED would give a shock to the heart as it is supposed to.

And if the ECG in this incident had shown a flat-line reading (asystole), then there is nothing much else the rescuers could have done except to continue with CPR until the ambulance arrived.

My other observation is that the public does not have enough experience to detect the pulse of a victim accurately.

Studies done overseas have shown that health care workers, let alone the public, very often do not detect the lack of pulse in a cardiac arrest victim.

In France, their answers were correct only 58 per cent of the time when checking the pulse for 10 seconds.

In Germany, only 2 per cent of health care workers identified the lack of a pulse

correctly within 10 seconds.

AEDs are very easy to operate. In fact, a study in the United States showed that sixth-grade schoolchildren had operated the AED successfully, although slower than professional paramedics by 23 seconds (as a mean).

All the children placed the electrode pads appropriately and all remained clear of the "victim". In fact, if you search on the Internet for "One year old using AED", you can watch a video of a child that young operating the device.

In short, any company or individual who find themselves in a situation where they are not sure whether to use their AED, they should do so.

Singapore has come a long way to have AEDs in both public and corporate areas.

Using the iPhone app "AED Nearby" and Android app "ShowNearby AED" — both free for download — will reveal that there are many AEDs in Singapore, however unevenly distributed they are.

FOCUS ON THE FAMILY
BY DR BILL MAIER

BE HONEST WITH ADOPTED CHILD
When is the best time to tell a child that they were adopted? I get asked this question often from adoptive parents, and my answer is always the same: As soon as they're old enough to understand.

Obviously, it's important to use age-appropriate language. When the child is two or three, make sure they understand how special they are to you. Say to them: "Mummy and daddy chose you over all the other children in the world."

When they're a little older, you might start explaining the difference between a biological and an adoptive parent.

A four-year-old could be told that some kids have two different mums — one who took care of them inside her tummy, and another who took them home from the hospital to love and care for them.

Adoptive kids will find out sooner or later. And if you've kept it a secret, they'll wonder what else you haven't told them.

So, be as honest as you can from the earliest age.

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STRESS AND WORKING FROM HOME
PART 1 OF 2
By Mr. Kirby Chua (Singapore Registered Psychologist)

People who work from home end up being more stressed because they don't have the place to escape the pressure that accumulates from the work place. This is one of the common complaints of self-employed people who simply don't know when to stop working. An advantage of the regular 9am-6pm staff is that they have the luxury of 'leaving' their work behind in the work place to spend their non-working hours including public holidays completely for themselves. During these hours, the 9-6 worker can completely forget about what happened in their work place and completely detach from the stress and the pressures of their work. This story is not the same for some who are either self-employed or those who hold positions with tremendous responsibilities. These are the people who would usually complain that 10 hours at work is not enough to fulfill their day's tasks and responsibilities. What usually happens here is that some of them take their work home and that is when the stress multiplies in their lives.

This behavior of taking work home takes the form of having subtle thoughts about work to the more obvious behaviors of bringing their computers and their entire files home with them. Some literally don't bring anything home from the office but they spend their time away thinking and worrying about their work. This subtle form of taking work home drives the person to allow stressful thoughts about work to dominate their consciousness even while sleeping! On the other hand, people who bring their files and laptops to their home barely get enough sleep; and when they do, they wake up the next day only to go back to their work place! Even computers and office machines need some rest to cool down; if not from home, where else can we get it?

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