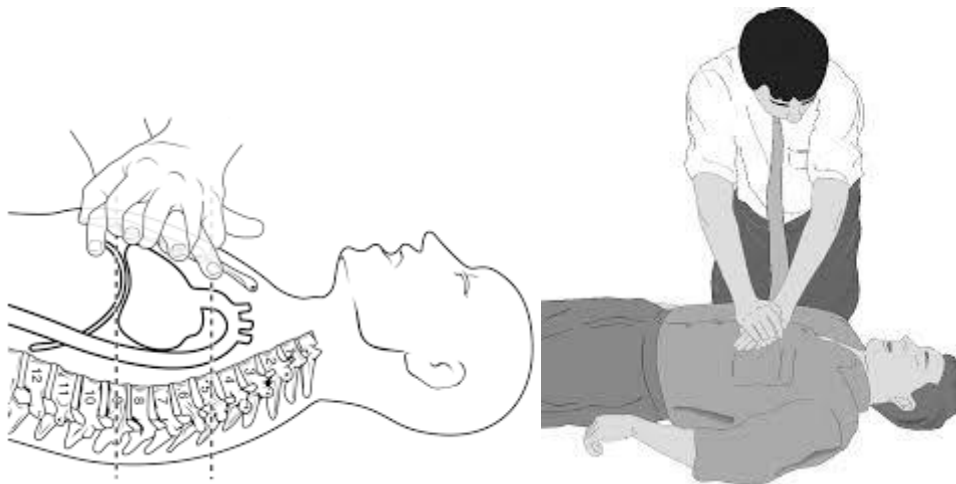


## **DEFIBRILLATORS**

The parish council is attempting to procure a community automatic defibrillator through the British Heart Foundation. You might know me as the osteopath, or even the chap with the skeleton, but I am also a first aid trainer and so I thought it might be a good idea to explain what a defibrillator is, why they are so important, and how it can be used in the community.

Cardiac arrest is where the electrical activity in the heart stops working properly. It can happen at any time, even in outwardly very fit individuals. Only a few years ago, famously, a Premiership footballer collapsed during a match having suffered a cardiac arrest. If you come across someone who has suffered this, you would need to call 999 immediately (you can also call 112 if using a mobile). If you knew how, you could also perform cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR), including possibly the kiss of life, while you were waiting for the ambulance to arrive – if you didn't know how, the ambulance caller will talk you through how to do it.

Cardio means heart. The cardio bit of CPR involves mechanically squashing the heart and therefore squeezing the blood out of the heart and around the body. It means that the vital organs can still get supplied with oxygen and so can survive. You simply put one hand on top of the other on the centre of the casualty's chest and press down hard and fast, twice a second. Singing 'Nelly the Elephant' gives you a good rhythm (you don't have to sing it out loud!!). If you remember the TV adverts, you could also sing 'Staying Alive'.



Pulmonary means lungs. The pulmonary bit of CPR means blowing into the lungs to replenish oxygen that has been used, the so called 'kiss of life'. It is too difficult to explain in this article, and as the chest compressions is more important, if you haven't been trained how to do it, just continue to press down hard and fast.

If you have been trained to do so, carrying out the complete CPR routine is much better. However, all you are doing is keeping the blood and oxygen circulating; you are very unlikely to bring them back to life as it won't have an effect on the electrics. One of the things which can have an effect on the electrics is a defibrillator. On Casualty, this is the bit where the Dr

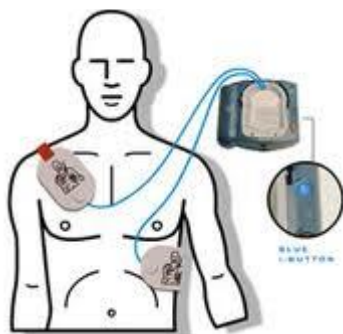
has paddles in his hands, puts them on the casualty's chest and shouts 'Clear!' before the casualty seems to jump up off the bed.

The defibrillator sends an electric current through the heart, which temporarily stops the heart's own electrical activity. The heart's own electrical activity is programmed to work correctly, so the intention is, that if you stop them, they will restart correctly, a bit like rebooting your computer. The quicker this is applied, the better the chances of survival. 2010 data in UK showed that with CPR alone, chances of survival were around 7%. With the use of a defibrillator, this increased to 38%, but if the defibrillator could be used in 3 minutes, chances of surviving jumped to 74%. For every minute that nothing is done, chances of survival decrease by about 10%.

In Hurstbourne Tarrant, we are at least 7 minutes from the ambulance station in Andover. And that, of course, assumes that the ambulance is there, and the crew is sat in it with the engine running!

There is now the possibility of communities purchasing their own portable defibrillators, in the hope that members of the community may be able to get defibrillator treatment sooner than an ambulance might arrive. These tend to be in a place central to the community, or a place where there are large gatherings of people, such as airports or train stations. The thought, at the moment, is that the George & Dragon may be a suitable place to locate the community defibrillator in HBT.

Portable defibrillators are the size of a medium sized book, and are designed to be used by lay people. The machine tells you what to do, flashing lights help indicate what it means, and there are pictures all over the apparatus. Following the instructions, you apply two pads to the bare skin of the chest and the defibrillator measures the electrical activity of the heart. If it deems it appropriate, it will either send a shock, or direct you to press a (flashing) button to send a shock. It won't send a shock unless it measures the electrical activity of the heart and deems that it is appropriate to do so, so you can't get it wrong.



Community defibrillators are normally housed in a brightly coloured case, which is secured by a combination lock. The 999 operator will give you that code. In addition, there could be a group of community members trained to use the defibrillator, who would know the code and be contactable by the 999 operator.



If you would like to learn more about these literally life saving skills, contact me on 736007 as I run the full range of First Aid at Work courses, including one specifically for defibrillators. If you think you would like to be one of the pool of volunteer defibrillator contacts, please contact Councillor Mark Thomas 736456.

Steve Swift

Hurstbourne Osteopathy Practice &  
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