

The Best Survival Tool

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- by Chip Georges

Alright let's face it. AEDs are here to stay. Certainly a hot topic right now and have been for awhile. If your workplace has not implemented AEDs already, I would bet a lot of money the subject has at least been discussed. Since there is more to an AED program than simply hanging one on the wall and hoping for the best, this article may contribute by helping you understand the difference between buying an AED and investing in a complete and compliant program. So without further delay, here is a little "defibrillation information" to grab your concentration.

I am not going to talk about how successful AEDs are, or why you should have them. I am not going to explain how AEDs protect a company's reputation. Those facts and reasons have been proven and written in article, after article, after article.

If someone tells you that AEDs are not a good thing, then please tell them to wake up. If they weren't, then the number of AEDs sold month after month would not be increasing the way they are.

Most decision makers whom I have had the fortune to meet spend most of their time in one-sided presentations with different sales reps from different AED Providers. All they talk about is the features of their particular AED and why theirs is the best. While that is certainly important, I believe that the buyer needs to do more than research the AED. He or she needs to understand what goes into a complete and compliant program.

ELEMENTS OF A COMPLETE PROGRAM

Such a program involves a series of steps that must be addressed, so that the program is not only compliant, but also carries the greatest chance of being successful. While these steps can seem overwhelming at first, in reality they are simple to achieve if you have the right help and support from a reputable program provider. The steps involved with a complete and compliant program are included in the following list. Some are required by law; others are simple and effective directives.

- 1) Site Assessment
- 2) Medical Direction & Oversight
- 3) Responder CPR/AED Training & Certification
- 4) EMS Notification

- 5) Maintenance and upkeep of the AEDs and the components of an AED Program.
- 6) Choosing the right AED & related accessories
- 7) Establishing Program awareness
- 8) Complying with any local ordinance(s)
- 9) Proper registration of AED / AED Program if required by state, county, or city.

The requirements don't end here. Most AEDs require a prescription. AEDs are Class 3 medical devices regulated by the FDA. However, there are a couple of models that do not require a prescription, but do not be misled by this promoted "convenience." You still need to satisfy the rest of the list.

Site Assessment

A site assessment is a time for you to look at your facility and figure out the best possible location to place your AED(s). A three to four minute response time is crucial.

Medical Direction and Oversight

This entails the direct involvement of a physician to help with the development, tracking, and upkeep of written policies, procedures, protocols, certifications, and program upkeep requirements.

Responder certification

This comes from being trained in CPR & AED administration by a Nationally Accredited Association (i.e. American Heart Association).

EMS notification

EMS notification involves notifying in writing, to the local EMS District, the location of your AEDs.

Maintenance and upkeep This part of the program involves the tracking and logging of AED maintenance checks, along with the tracking of responder certifications, as well as the monitoring of any regulatory changes that the laws may dictate.

Establishing program awareness

You establish program awareness by simply notifying all possible employees of your AED Program, and that your facility does indeed have AEDs. Some cities have local ordinances that require a registration process of some type, which may or may not involve a minimal fee.

Many AED providers have the capability of providing an AED management program that takes care of most, if not all, of the requirements discussed in the above paragraph. A nominal fee is required in most cases, but can be well worth it, especially if completing the requirements in-house is not feasible. Again, if you are working with a reputable sales rep, he/she will be able to point you in the right direction.

Choosing the Right AED

In regards to number 6 above, I wanted to talk about it last. I am surprised that, while you can indeed find out a lot about the AEDs on the internet, nowhere have I found a list of general questions that every AED buyer should ask when meeting with his AED Representative. All AEDs provide some type of shock therapy, but the similarities stop there. The “all AEDs are the same” attitude needs to be thrown out the window, and AEDs must be looked at very closely. Fortunately, the most important differences are right in front of you.

All AEDs are different, from the color, to the design, to the durability, to the level of support, to the cost of ownership. Your sales rep should have quick, honest answers about these features. If they spend more time talking about their competition than they do their own products, kindly escort him or her out of your office.

One important question that needs to be at the forefront of your mind is: “Who is this program being built around?” The *majority* of AED Programs need to be built around infrequent lay responders. This is important because the chances of the responder having never been involved in a Sudden Cardiac Arrest emergency are very high. Even if you are so fortunate to have EMTs, paramedics, or doctors on staff, the majority of those wonderful, lifesaving people still fall into the infrequent lay responder category when it comes to administering high quality CPR and defibrillation.

An SCA event is a scary, unforeseen, frightening, shocking (no pun intended), adrenaline rushed event. What a person learns through the videos in training is not exactly what happens during a live event. “Leisure Suit Larry” is not going to be lying all nice and pretty on his back, smiling without a bead of sweat on his forehead, with his shirt unbuttoned for you. Maximum support is needed and should be provided by the AED you are using. The less the responder has to quickly recall from training, the better.

Be cautious. All AEDs provide heart rhythm analysis, and shock therapy. However, your AED needs to say more than “ATTACH ELECTRODE PADS” and “PRESS SHOCK BUTTON.” Some models do say a little more than that, like “CALL 911”, but more support is still needed.

The Value of CPR Support

New technology has been out for awhile, so do not settle on just any “shock box.” Make sure your AED provides some type of CPR support. Most AEDs do not, but finding one and paying a little extra for them is worth every penny. The chance of an infrequent lay responder performing adequate CPR in a live event is *very* low. Why? The answer is in the description of the person responding, the *infrequent* lay responder. This is one of the reasons that the American Heart Association comes out with newer guidelines for CPR and AED administration every five to six years. They always stress the “push hard, push fast” principle and they do that by increasing the compression recommendation.

Why is having an AED with CPR support so important? Consider this: Half the time an AED is used, no shock will be advised. However, *every* victim will need high quality CPR to survive. In other words, there is about a 50% chance that when an AED is put on a victim, that AED will say something to the effect of “NO SHOCK ADVISED” (or something similar) . Thus, if your AED does not provide CPR support, that AED only helps you halfway through that frightening situation. Now I do not know about you, but if I needed an AED to be used on me, I certainly don’t want it to help my Good Samaritan only halfway.

Questions to Aid Your Research

I will begin to wrap up this article with a simple list of questions that you can use when researching AEDs. As I said earlier, your sales rep should have quick answers to the following questions:

- 1) How much is the initial cost of the AED and related accessories?
- 2) What is the true cost of ownership of the AED? (I.e. how much do replacement pads and batteries cost, and how often do I need to replace them?)
- 3) Can my AED be upgraded when newer CPR/AED guidelines are implemented? (Trust me, this will happen, and some AED manufacturers took nearly a year and a half to provide upgrade capabilities to their customers)
- 4) Can my AED be upgraded on site, or do I have to send it in? What will be the approximate cost to upgrade?
- 5) What type of batteries does the AED use? (Are they available over-the-counter, or must they be purchased from the manufacturer?)
- 6) What type of pads does the AED use? (one piece pad or two piece pad)
- 7) How durable is the AED? What is the IP (ingress protection) rating of the device? (All AEDs get rated for protection again environmental elements, including water and dust. Some AEDs are even classified as light-duty, indoor-use AEDs.
- 8) How well does the AED replicate and remind me of what I learned in training?

- 9) Does the AED provide just audio, or does it also provide clear visual prompts as well?
(Hint: An SCA event is not exactly a quiet situation.)
- 10) What type of support will the AED provide if no shock is advised?
- 11) What type of CPR support does the AED Provide? (none, minimal CPR prompting, or real-time CPR coaching/feedback?)

These questions address critical factors that will help you decide which AED is right for you; also, don't hesitate to perform some background research on the AED manufacturer. The right AED can, and in most cases, will make the difference between a successful rescue, and an event full of confusion.

While this information all at once can seem overwhelming, it is imperative to understand all the different steps that go into an AED Program. A good sales rep will coach you through the different steps so that you feel comfortable and confident that your program is complete and compliant. Enjoy your AED Program implementation. It is without a doubt a lifesaving program.

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