

AEDs in the Workplace: Benefit or Burden?

Overview

- Cardiac arrest is the leading cause of death according to the American Heart Association.
 - o Studies show that 10,000 sudden cardiac arrests occur while victims are at work.
- Placing AEDs in the workplace, along with providing a proper management system and training for employees on how to use these devices, can mean the difference between life and death, proponents argue.
 - o Effective AED responses should occur within 3-5 minutes after the person collapses.
- Device malfunctions and recalls, myriad legal requirements, and concerns of cost and potential liability have kept many organizations from implementing a program.

Issues That Can Occur

- The defibrillator industry has recalled hundreds of thousands of devices and has notified the FDA about thousands of adverse-incident reports, including device failure during a rescue attempt that may have contributed to patient harm or death.
- Problems include the AED displaying error messages, being unable to power up, and failing to deliver shocks.
- Other problems that can occur-especially after years of nonuse-include:
 - o Software bugs causing error messages or malfunctions.
 - o Electrodes drying out if not maintained and regularly replaced.
 - o Malfunctioning resistors, which can lead to misdiagnosis or sudden cardiac arrest.
 - o Issues with battery management, recharging, or accidental discharge.
 - o Faulty circuit boards.
 - o Incompatible or damaged cables and connectors.
 - o Issues arising from humid conditions.

Legal Issues and Liabilities Around AEDs

- There are legal issues and liabilities around AEDs.
 - o AEDs are considered medical devices and the FDA oversees their manufacture.
- There is no national requirement mandating employers provide AEDs in the workplace.
 - o All 50 states have enacted laws or regulations for these devices.
 - o While state laws vary, they generally address AED availability in public buildings, conditions of use, medical oversight, training requirements, and post-event reporting.
 - o The use of AEDs is part of the Good Samaritan laws which vary by state but generally protect a bystander from civil liability for voluntarily aiding someone who is injured or ill in an emergency.
 - If an AED is provided in the workplace, the employer must ensure AED devices comply with public-access defibrillation legislation, provide

employee training defined by their state Good Samaritan laws, and act in good faith with proactive intention to save lives.

- Employers are responsible for ensuring employees are trained on these devices and in CPR.

Setting Up an AED Program

- The AHA strongly encourages organizations to properly implement an AED program to increase the chances of survival of those who suffer sudden cardiac arrest.
- Each workplace should assess its own requirements for an AED program as part of its first-aid response.
- According to OSHA, issues to consider include compliance with local, state, and federal regulations; coordinating with local emergency services (EMS); the creation of a quality-assurance program; the training of employees on proper use of the AED device; and the performance of periodic reviews.
 - Most states require employers to coordinate their AED program with local EMS and to provide follow-up data to EMS after the device is used.
- There are several AEDs on the market that are suitable for an organization's program. The AHA does not recommend a particular one but suggests choosing a simple, easy-to-use device.
- Regardless of what AED selected, employers must ensure technical support is available when needed.
 - Call the manufacturer's technical support number and see what response you get.
 - Is a representative available to help you right away?
 - Are you on hold for a long time?
 - Does your call go to voice mail?
 - Be sure to research the manufacturer's history before purchasing an AED.
- Ensure program support is available; some AED manufacturers provide help with program implementation and ongoing support.
 - These manufacturers can assist with placement, registration, training, and supplies.
- It is important to implement an ongoing maintenance and training routine.
 - Organizations must visually inspect AEDs weekly or monthly to ensure they are working correctly.
 - Contact the manufacturer periodically to obtain the latest information about software updates or upgrades.
 - Ensure employees are trained and comfortable using the device.

Closing

- The decision to adopt an AED Program should not be taken lightly since there are many factors to consider. Employers must decide if implementing a program is the right choice for their organization and employees.