

Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) & Emergency Response Concerns for Personal Trainers

written by David Herbert | July 21, 2016

In the last column of this CPH Bulletin, we provided several emergency response tips for personal trainers dealing with clients in need of such emergency services. One of the most important aspects of any Emergency Action Plan (EAP) deals with the issue of Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) for use when needed in the course of providing personal training services. Based upon the legislative actions taken in several states requiring the placement of AEDs in a variety of health and fitness facilities as well as the foreseeability of having a need to use such devices during training activities, personal trainers and other fitness professionals must decide on whether or not to integrate AEDs as part of their EAPs.

AEDs are portable electronic devices used to defibrillate a person suffering from cardiac arrhythmias/ cardiac arrest. Without the use of such devices, a person suffering from a cardiac arrest will have irreversible brain damage or even die if not treated with an electrical shock within 3-5 minutes of the occurrence of such an untoward event. Delay in the provision of defibrillation in such circumstances reduces the change of survival by 10% for each minute of delay from the moment of arrest.

In those states or even local jurisdictions where laws have been adopted mandating the presence of AEDs within health and fitness facilities, there will be little question that such devices must be secured and put in place for use. In other jurisdictions without such legal requirements, fitness professionals will need to decide if AEDs should be located on premises for use in the event of need. While the standard of care as to the placement and use of AEDs in these kinds of facilities is developing and evolving, it appears that the trend is toward the placement and use of such AEDs in facilities where fitness activities are carried out.

All 50 states and the U.S. federal government have enacted laws providing immunity from civil liability to one degree or another for those using such devices in emergency situations. Many fitness associations and organizations recommend the use of such devices in fitness settings. If the decision is made to acquire such devices, then the following matters need to be considered:

- If AEDs are acquired, how many are needed? The answer to this question depends on the size of the facility and the timeliness of the response that will be needed to effectively use such devices in different areas of the facility. An effective response to a client in need of an AED is 3-5 minutes or faster from the time that an untoward event occurs to be successful. Longer response times may and probably will result in residual client damage and ultimately death. In this regard, the

time for a fitness professional to get to and use an AED needs to be within that general timeframe or less. Faster is better in this regard. If response time exceeds five (5) minutes then the effective use of an AED greatly diminishes. By ten (10) minutes from the original event the AED becomes dramatically ineffective in benefiting a client who at that point may well suffer substantial deterioration and/or death.

- If AEDs are secured and properly placed within service areas for timely response, fitness professionals need to be provided with training or at least basic instruction as to their role within the facility's EAP. If off-premises emergency response is available within 3-5 minutes to a client in any area of the facility from the time an untoward event occurs, then the importance of AEDs within such facilities is greatly diminished unless otherwise required by law. However, a 3-5 minute response time from off-premises emergency response is probably not very realistic and may thus require on-premise location of such devices
- If AEDs are secured and properly placed, inspection and maintenance of such devices needs to be conducted on a regular basis in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations and instructions. Such devices should not be kept under lock and key to be accessible for use. Batteries need to be checked and replaced when necessary and in accordance with facilities EAPs and the manufacturer's recommendations and instructions.
- The use of AEDs within facilities needs to be part of EAP rehearsal and practice. If reasonable response times are not documented in conjunction with such rehearsals, better AED placement or response times need to be adjusted. Records of rehearsals demonstrating compliance with reasonable response times should be kept by facilities.

The placement and timely use of AEDs when necessary improves the chances of survival for clients suffering specific untoward events in health and fitness facilities. The provision and use of such devices in accordance with applicable recommendations also protects fitness professionals from liability.

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