

Power to help save a life

Sean Morley doesn't miss a beat after a Philips HeartStart defibrillator helped save his life

Sean Morley stepped up to bat in the fifth inning of his junior high school baseball game. The air was still and balmy at Deerfield, Illinois' Jewett Park. Shifting from one foot to the other, the 13-year-old tightened his grip and watched the pitcher wind up and throw. Suddenly the ball slammed into Sean's chest, hitting his heart at a vulnerable time during the cycle between beats. His heart muscle quivered erratically as he slumped to the ground, unconscious. Sean was in cardiac arrest.

Every minute the heart remains in that erratic rhythm, known as ventricular fibrillation, survival rates decrease by ten percent. While cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) can often help delay damage to the brain and heart by providing oxygen to these organs, one thing is certain. Only a shock from a defibrillator will make the heart go back into normal rhythm.

Norma Morley watched numbly as two physicians who were sitting in the stands ran down to the field and started CPR on her son. One parent called 911 while another ran up to the adjacent Deerfield police department and flagged down an officer. By an astonishing stroke of luck, six Deerfield squad cars had recently been

equipped with Philips portable automated external defibrillators (AEDs). Officer Geoff Ruther grabbed his defibrillator and ran onto the field. He attached the electrode pads and, following the voice prompts, pressed the flashing button indicating "Shock Advised." Immediately the electrical shock restored an organized rhythm, and blood surged through Sean's heart once again.

The paramedics arrived moments later and Sean was hospitalized overnight for observation. Aside from having a hard time catching his breath the first night, and being very tired, Sean had no pain or discomfort. "I was really hungry," he remembered. "I was ready to eat dinner." Sean was incredibly lucky that events happened the way they did that day and a defibrillator was close by when it was needed. Unfortunately, paramedics and police can't always get there so quickly. That's why schools around the country are equipping their campuses with defibrillators.

Sean Morley's dramatic cardiac arrest from commotio cordis, or a blow to the chest, may be more common than realized. Minneapolis Heart Institute Foundation researchers found that any blow to the

"Automated external defibrillators are changing the face of survival from one of the nation's leading killers. They have the potential to be the greatest single advance in the treatment of cardiac arrest along with CPR."

Denise Gerlach

American Heart Association

chest is capable of producing cardiac arrest, especially in younger children with narrow rib cages and underdeveloped chest muscles. Deaths have resulted from being hit in the chest by softballs, baseballs, hollow toy baseball bats and snowballs.

Yet most sudden cardiac arrests in young people are caused by undetected congenital defects. While many states require students to pass a physical, students are often not asked about past chest pain or a family history of sudden cardiac arrest.

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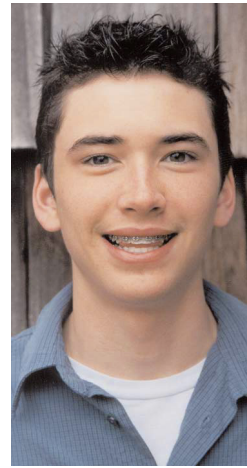
Having defibrillators at schools not only benefits students, faculty and staff members. Schools often host sporting, cultural and community events with thousands of parents, visitors, and other guests on school grounds throughout the year.

Today, Sean happily runs laps in practice as a starter on the freshman basketball team at Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire, Illinois. Near his gym is a defibrillator that was purchased after the father of girls' basketball coach Frank Mattucci collapsed and suffered a fatal heart attack while watching a championship game in the stands several years ago.

Sean's biggest decision now is whether to play for the baseball or volleyball team in the spring. "I think back and really feel lucky," he exclaims. "Whenever I hear about another person being saved by a defibrillator, I wonder why everyone doesn't have one."

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Printed in The Netherlands
MAR 2012