

PREPARING FOR AND DEALING WITH A MEDICAL CRISIS

We've all seen the television shows – someone is sitting there in a public place and keels over. Another person yells out “does anyone know CPR?” or “is anyone a doctor?” and panic breaks out as people gather around the victim.

If you were in that situation, would you know what to do? If not, read on to learn more about the appropriate steps to take, and how to effectively deal with a situation in which a medical crisis happens.

While you won't fully learn CPR by reading this story, you should walk away with tips on how to recognize an emergency and what steps to take to handle it appropriately.

The Carnation spoke with The American Red Cross' Barb Dyer from its Indianapolis office to get some helpful information and tips.

The Carnation: What are some things that are taught in terms of recognizing emergencies?

Dyer: When we teach in our classes about recognizing emergencies, we teach attendees that they are going to be using their senses – hearing, sight, and smell, and then what I call common sense because it's unusual odors or behaviors that can tell you that something is potentially wrong.

The Carnation: What are some of those common sense things?

Dyer: With your sense of sight, you see smoke, someone has fallen down or a car crash. With the sense of hearing, you hear people screaming, big booms, or sirens. With your sense of smell, you smell fire, gas or just something that doesn't belong there. Those are what I call common sense because if you're looking at somebody and they look sick – they're pale in color, sluggish, sweating or just not like they normally are – something may be wrong. Perhaps you see someone you think is drunk stumbling around. Is that a drunk or could it be a diabetic?

The Carnation: If something is out of place, what do you suggest doing next?

Dyer: You Check, Call, Care. You'll **check** the scene to see what's wrong and to see if it's safe for you to enter. For example, if you're talking about down electrical lines, you don't want to get anywhere near them. It's asking “is the scene safe or can it be made safe?” Then, you check the victim. Is the victim conscious? If no, check to see if they have signs of life, which means asking yourself ‘are they breathing’ or ‘is there movement’? If the answer to ‘are they conscious’ is no, then you **call**. You have someone call 911 immediately.

If you check them and they are conscious, you should check them to see if there is anything else wrong with them and find out if you need to call 911. If they're conscious but sitting there and you take a look at their leg and you see an obvious break, you should call 911.

After you make the determination as to whether 911 should be called, you'll provide **care** for the issues you found in your check. If you determine that the victim is bleeding severely, you'll care for severe bleeding. If you've determined that the victim is an adult and has no signs of life, you will need to begin CPR. If it's a child that is not breathing but has signs of life and has a pulse, you would begin breathing for the child.

The Carnation: What is the most important thing for responders in crisis situations?

Dyer: You have to remain calm because if you are not calm, you're not going to be able to think. When I teach CPR,

while it's not written in the book, I tell people that they can have their 30 seconds of freak out, but then you have to get back on track. You need to remain calm, and a lot of people will do so. It's after it that they break down. The biggest thing to do in any emergency situation is to activate EMS.

The Carnation: Tell us about the American Red Cross' CPR Training programs, and how the certification works.

Dyer: Adult CPR takes about three and a half hours of training. Adult/Child/Infant takes about six hours of training. Many chapters will also offer online training, so what you do is take the content knowledge and written exam online, but you still have to do a skill session and the physical skills before you're certified.

The certification is valid for a year, and what it says is that you have successfully completed the training requirements for certification by the American Red Cross. Our CPR and AED certifications are valid for one year. If they choose to take First Aid, that certification is valid for three years.

The Carnation: Can you tell us what the First Aid certification covers in addition to CPR training?

Dyer: First Aid certification covers controlling bleeding, splinting, injuries to muscles, bones and joints, and general information. It also covers sudden illness, which includes poisoning, heat and cold emergencies, allergic reactions, stroke, diabetes, fainting and seizures. It also covers checking

of the unconscious victim and caring for a conscious choking victim. That certification training takes four hours as a stand alone, and approximately two and a half additional hours when in combination with the other CPR trainings.

The Carnation: What should our members know about the Red Cross' thoughts on the importance of getting CPR trained?

Dyer: We recommend that everyone gets trained. The more people trained, the more people will be willing to help if a situation arises.

The Carnation: Is there any liability on someone who responds to an emergency situation if the victim doesn't make it or decides to sue for some reason?

Dyer: You're in a gray area there. While all 50 states have Good Samaritan laws, each law is different.

The Carnation: Talk to us a little about how Delta Sigs can find their local American Red Cross chapter.

Dyer: You can contact your local chapter by going online to redcross.org and there is a zip code search finder for our chapters. Most do have a web site and will have their CPR classes posted there.

Barb Dyer is the Emergency Response Training Manager for The American Red Cross of Greater Indianapolis. She can be reached at bdyer@redcross-indy.org for further information.

