



SCAA Urges More Awareness, Improved Response and Community Prevention of Cardiac Arrest in Light of Recent Student Athlete Deaths

WASHINGTON, DC, March 8, 2011 – According to the Sudden Cardiac Arrest Association (SCAA), sudden cardiac arrest (SCA) kills nearly 300,000 Americans each year, which equates to approximately 1,000 people a day. The occurrence of SCA in youth is especially traumatic and rare; however, SCA afflicts people of all ages, races, gender and even those in seemingly good physical health.

SCA is an electrical disruption of the heart's natural rhythm, in which the heart stops beating altogether and is not the same as a "heart attack" in which one or more of the heart's main blood vessels becomes blocked, preventing blood from reaching the heart, Most often SCA strikes suddenly and without warning, causing victims to collapse and become unconscious whereas "heart attack" patients typically experience chest pain and remain conscious.

Statistics on SCA are not exact, since SCA currently is not widely recognized as a formal reportable condition. Though several attempts have been made over the past few decades to establish a reporting structure, sadly there still is no mandatory nationwide reporting system that routinely captures SCA incidence and outcomes. We do however know that:

- between 5,000-7,000 youth in the United States die from SCA each year
- over 3,000 adolescents and young adults (age 14-24) experience cardiovascularrelated death per year
- every three days, a young competitive athlete suffers SCA
- over 64 percent of young athletes (and others) survived SCA if it occurred in a high school with an AED program

The only way to survive SCA is through cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and the use of an automated external defibrillator (AED), yet sadly, 95 percent of victims do not survive because most SCA occurrences are not witnessed and/or urgent medical care could not be provided in a timely fashion. Therefore, AEDs need to be available in public places and bystanders need to know CPR, how to use an AED and be willing to intervene. Schools and sporting venues should develop a written Emergency Response Plan addressing SCA. Such plans must include the following key elements:

- training of likely first responders (i.e. coaches, athletic trainers, teachers and administrators) in CPR/AED and how to recognize SCA, as the condition is often initially misdiagnosed due to brief seizure-like activity, delaying effective treatment.
- defibrillation to be administered in under three minutes from the moment of collapse for optimal response.

Parents and educators should be concerned that sudden cardiac arrest is a serious public health crisis and know that preventive measures can be taken to identify individuals at risk. Conducting a comprehensive personal and family medical history is helpful, as is the inclusion of an electrocardiogram (ECG) in screening procedures of athletes that may detect potentially lethal cardiac disorders.

In the meantime, AEDs can be deployed in public locations in communities across the country – schools, churches, shopping malls or other large gathering places. Medical and patient-advocacy organizations have long promoted placement of AEDs in public settings as a means to increase the likelihood of SCA survival. A study in the January 26, 2011 issue of the New England Journal of Medicine proved that publicly accessible defibrillation works, as 60 percent of people who suffered a witnessed SCA in public places had shockable heart rhythms, compared to 35 percent of people who may have benefited from an AED while experiencing SCA at home.

SCAA fully supports efforts to require the installation of AEDs at schools nationwide. For educational resources and materials to deploy AEDs in schools, visit www.suddencardiacarrest.org.

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About the Sudden Cardiac Arrest Association

SCAA is the nation's largest nonprofit advocacy organization dedicated to increasing awareness and prevention of sudden cardiac arrest. For more information, please visit www.suddencardiacarrest.org.