

## Add saving lives to high school curriculum

By Bruce Walkinshaw - The Tri-City News

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On Friday, the ACT Foundation brought its successful high school CPR program to the Tri-Cities, giving schools the tools they need to teach Grade 10 students how to save lives.

I usually hate using the term “common sense” because it is quite often used as a substitute for the term “my opinion,” but I think it is safe to say that this is a common-sense program that was well overdue and we should thank the ACT Foundation, along with its partner organizations, for implementing it.

But why stop there?

Let’s make courses in both CPR and its Samaritan cousin, first aid, part of the province-wide curriculum necessary to graduate high school.

Consider all the marginally usable things you were forced to memorize in high school before you could graduate: historical dates, volcano parts, sewing techniques or the periodic table. (Talk about wasting resources: it’s a chart whose purpose is to provide us information at a glance so we don’t have to commit it to memory.)

Some of it you used, and all of it someone used, but the majority of it you probably did not need to memorize. Even if your day-to-day job now requires you to know the inner workings of a cinder cone volcano or the exact date the last spike was hammered home, would you really rank the memorization of that information ahead, in potential societal impact, of learning CPR and first aid techniques?

CPR and first aid training are like golf: Once you have one part of your game down, there is always another part to work on.

According to the Heart and Stroke Foundation, “Once the heart stops pumping, seconds count. For every minute that passes without help, a person’s chance of surviving drops by about 10%. But if you know how to respond to a cardiac arrest, their odds of survival and recovery may increase by 30% or more.”

Effective CPR enables enough oxygen to reach the brain to delay brain damage or death, and allows the heart to remain responsive to defibrillation attempts when paramedics arrive. Performing effective CPR or first aid not only saves lives but, also, mitigates the damage suffered by the victims, saving money for both the medical system and society in general.

Surely, in the great list of essential high school curricula, learning CPR and first aid should score somewhere in importance under learning English and above sewing a handbag.

How great would it be if every year, our school system turned out thousands of competent, confident amateur first aid technicians to roam the streets and malls to happenstance upon medical situations where they could be of some assistance?

And what about the Big One — the great earthquake scientists are expecting to level the Lower Mainland sometime in the next 100 years (if global warming doesn't take us first)?

Now that we have seismically upgraded their schools, why not have students crawl out from underneath their desks, pick up little emergency first aid kits from the bin at the back of the field and head home to check on the rest of us?

“Hey kid, my taxes paid for that kit; now get over here and stop my severed leg from bleeding out.”

Let's add CPR and first aid to the high school curriculum so we can train our province's youth to become as intimate with these lifesaving techniques as they are with cumulonimbus clouds and the names of the Great Lakes.

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