

Teaching students to save lives

By Daniel Pi - North Shore Outlook - March 27, 2008



CPR training - Argyle secondary student Taylor McLennan (left) and PE teacher Darren Rath demonstrate the proper technique for two-person CPR during a first aid class at the high school.

When PE teacher Darren Rath tells his students first aid training can have a profound impact on their lives, he says so based on experience.

Years ago, Rath got his initial first aid training as a student at Argyle secondary. The certification helped him land a job at the local recreation centre that summer. It's also helped him treat injured soccer players and ice skaters and even colleagues.

It even helped pay his tuition to become a teacher, and now it's brought him back to Argyle, where he's teaching first aid.

"I'm really proud Argyle is doing this," Rath says. "I think it's really important, you never know when they (the students) will be in a situation where they have to help somebody."

Today, Rath's students are positioned around the wrestling mats in a classroom, each next to a specialized mannequin commonly called "Annie" dolls, which are used to teach CPR.

Rath sets the scenario: each student has just come across an unresponsive toddler. The room erupts with screams as the frantic-sounding students call out for help.

They ask for somebody to call 911 and report there's an unconscious baby, not breathing. Next, they ask for a helper to come back and tell them how long the ambulance will take.

"Go," Rath says to one student then turns to another who goes through the same list of requests. "Go, go, go!"

All the students start performing CPR, but Rath instantly notices a problem and halts the class.

"A couple of you are sitting down with legs crossed doing this," Rath says while half-heartedly pushing on a mannequin's chest with two fingers. "It's not doing anything. Get on your knees, you don't want your elbows bent.

"This is your baby, you gotta save it."

According to Sandra Clarke, executive director of the Advanced Coronary Treatment (ACT) Foundation – which originally brought the CPR course to Argyle – teaching students CPR is part of the foundation's goal to raise awareness, save lives and make it a mandatory course in all high schools in Canada.

So far, Ontario, Alberta and Manitoba have made CPR training mandatory.

Argyle secondary was one of 20 schools in the Vancouver area that originally made CPR training mandatory in its curriculum in 2000 and benefited with training and CPR mannequins through the ACT Foundation. Other North Shore schools participating are Carson Graham and Handsworth.

Today 100 high schools in B.C. have joined and Clarke says she wants the provincial government to make it mandatory.

"It's really to make a sustained impact and ensure everybody learns CPR," Clarke explains.

She adds statistics show eight out of 10 pre-hospital cardiac arrests happen at home, and currently only 15 per cent of the time someone trained in CPR can offer treatment immediately.

When CPR is administered, the chances of survival increase by four times, she says.

“You need CPR in the first few minutes (of a cardiac arrest), it’s critical.”

Back at Argyle, one of Rath’s students has asked whether a first aid attendant would break the ribs of a child while performing CPR. (While performing chest compressions, it is possible to break ribs to get the heart pumping blood.)

“If you break some ribs and save their life, fantastic ... Limbs and bones you worry (about) afterwards,” Rath responds.

Despite the sometimes-careless attitude of the students, Rath believes he still gets the message through to them. He tries to turn the exercises into real world situations the students can find themselves in.

Learning CPR on a child or toddler can mean saving the life of a brother or sister, or the baby they’re looking after. Knowing CPR can help them get a job later on at the rec centre or bartending, and help them save the life of a coworker or customer.

“This group has been fantastic,” Rath says. “When it comes to learning the skills, they all demonstrate they understand it.”

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