

Successful Defibrillation on a Beach by Volunteer Surf Lifesavers.

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We would like to report what may be the first-ever case of a volunteer surf lifesaver performing defibrillation using a semiautomatic external defibrillator on a beach. In July 1997, we both volunteer surf lifesavers - were at Noosa Beach to shoot the technical photographs for the new edition of the Surf Life Saving Australia training manual

As we walked onto the beach, we found a real rescue in progress by a lifeguard and a volunteer lifesaver. An elderly man had been bodysurfing with his brother-in-law and was suddenly found floating face-down in the water. This did not seem like a drowning; the victim was not breathing and had no pulse, and we suspected a heart attack. Bystanders were asked to use their mobile phone to summon the ambulance while we commenced cardiopulmonary resuscitation with the help of an air bag resuscitator, which we happened to have with us for the photographs.

Leahy was one of a small number of lifesavers in Australia trained to use semiautomatic external defibrillators (SAEDS) as part of a trial, and he just happened to have the SAED back at our apartment. Someone was sent urgently to get the SAED, and returned within 10 minutes. Leahy, being the only person actually trained in its use, and familiar with the unit, connected it. By this time, the victim had been ventilated by means of the air bag resuscitator (with a Guedel airway) for almost 20 minutes.

SAED (Laerdal 911; Laerdal Medical Corp., Wappingers Falls, NY, USA) analysis indicated a shockable rhythm, and after two shocks of 200 joules and one of 360 joules the victim started breathing, his colour improved and sinus rhythm was re-established. The SAED indicated that the pulse should be checked, and we detected a radial pulse, but could not feel a carotid pulse at this time. As the victim was breathing shallowly and erratically, positive pressure ventilation with the air bag was maintained until regular, efficient breathing was established.

The resuscitated victim was then taken to hospital. He was released 11 days after admission, well and with no detectable neurological deficits. In January 1998 he was well, and swimming, cycling and walking daily with no chest pain. He appeared to have no neurological deficits, but has complete memory loss from about two weeks before to immediately after the incident.

This was the first time that a SAED was used on the beach by a surf lifesaver from Surf Life Saving Australia. We believe that this is the first time volunteer lifesavers have defibrillated a patient anywhere in the world.