

CPR Month highlights need for education, defibrillators across community



It was a sunny September Friday when Carmen Wong felt her heart start to race.

She wasn't under any particular amount of stress; indeed, she had just had what she described as a 'happy conversation' with her boss as she had just passed the probationary period in her new job at an insurance company.

But, despite the calm of the situation, her heart continued to race and, a few seconds later, it stopped beating.

Barely a second passed, however, before her quick-thinking boss Brandon and co-worker Stephanie began to perform CPR on her.

'They saved my life, and also saved my family,' says Wong.

Wong shared her story last week as the Region of York and York Region Paramedic Services held workshops to mark CPR Month.

Joining Wong in her advocacy was her hero colleague, Stephanie Ho, who credits swimming classes in her youth as equipping her with what she needed to know to save a life.

'My parents thought CPR and knowing how to swim are really important life skills to have and just feeling that, in an emergency, you at least have someone to jump in and help because even with how fast the paramedics are, it still takes time to get a phone call in, getting people to help. You could be that person who gets to [the person in need] first and it really makes a difference,' says Ho. 'I feel like what happened with this incident shows how big and significant it is - knowing that because I did CPR first, that's what kept the oxygen flowing in her and it gave the paramedics more time when they came in to do everything. It's really important because you never know how long it is going to take and it's a good [skill] to have in case there is an emergency.'

Carrie Harder, Deputy Chief of York Paramedic Services, says the importance of administering CPR right away, as soon as a person is seen as being in distress, can't be understated.

'The more people we can encourage to become trained out in the community the greater effect it can have on people's lives, especially like Carmen's - someone was there and was able to start CPR right away and it makes a huge difference. That's why we hold CPR Month annually to reinforce the importance of it - getting some training and having the courage to act as Stephanie did that day.'

From the Heart & Stroke Foundation to St. John Ambulance and any number of swim schools, there is no shortage of ways to get

trained. It's a myth, Harder notes, that CPR necessarily means mouth-to-mouth resuscitation ? a factor she attributes to sometimes being a barrier between people and the CPR training they need.

?It was found through research that just doing the chest compressions alone can create that sustainable circulation of oxygen in time for emergency personnel to get there,? she says. ?You certainly can if you have the training ? definitely if it is your family member or someone you know, it will make a huge difference; but if you can't, doing those chest compressions makes a big difference.

?[More training] will make a significant difference because more cardiac arrests occur in the home or workplace than when you're actually in the hospital, so just even having one person in your family that knows, one person in the business where you work, makes a huge difference, especially now that we have 1,000 automatic external defibrillators across York Region. Having folks that are there, trained and ready to use those AEDs in conjunction with CPR can improve somebody's chances of survival by 25 per cent. When you call 911, the folks on the phone are able to give pre-arrival instructions as well, so even if you don't have a hard copy of a resource, the person on the other end of 911 can walk you through what to do. It's also very important to call 911, get that help started right away and you've got someone on the other end of the line to walk you through what needs to be done to help.

?It is really important to [highlight] how Stephanie's actions really contributed to why we're here ? I just want to say thank you so much for your courage, because you have made a huge difference in the life of Carmen and her family.?

Added Stephanie: ?I feel good that I was able to help her in such a situation because I never knew me knowing CPR would have such a big impact and seeing [Carmen is] breathing, she's walking, and happily living her life makes me feel so happy that I got to be there to let this all happen and I feel really happy that she's still by my side, still my co-worker and just enjoying her life. Her being happy makes me really happy, too.?

For more local resources on CPR, visit york.ca/CPR.

By Brock Weir