

Employees Save Coworker's Life at Medtronic Emergency Response Systems, Thanks to On-site LIFEPAK® AED Program

DEAN COWLES is an easy-going, laidback kind of guy. Although his work as an engineer at Medtronic Emergency Response Systems (ERS) can be stressful, he has always kept his life in balance with humor—and when things got too tense he would walk outside and relax with a cigarette.

That changed suddenly on July 18, 2006, when Dean suffered a heart attack at his desk that led to sudden cardiac arrest.

Dean was lucky. Employees at Medtronic Emergency Response Systems know how to handle such emergencies. Thanks to a program started in July 2004 by former president of Medtronic ERS, Bob White, and continued by current president, Chris O'Connell, all Medtronic employees are expected to be trained in CPR and in the use of an automated external defibrillator (AED)—after all, that is one product Medtronic builds!

So when coworkers heard Dean struggling to breathe they were quick to act. Ed Fallon immediately called 9-1-1 while Oscar Rojas assessed Dean's condition and Kim Arnold went looking for the AED. Dean was still sitting in his chair but losing consciousness quickly when Oscar called for the AED. Dean was moved to the floor where Oscar began CPR breathing while Steve Copeland began chest compressions.

Dean laughs that Steve participates in the Highland Games every year—"he's a guy who throws telephone poles for a hobby!" When you need CPR, that's who you want on your team. Soon after the event, Dean's ribs were sore and he hesitated to cough, but he welcomed the reminder of just how close he came to losing everything and how his coworkers turned it all around with their rescue efforts.

The AED arrived within one minute and the first shock was delivered. Steve Firman, Dean's manager, stayed with Dean throughout the entire episode and commented later about, "how slow it seemed we were doing things, but the CODE SUMMARY™ report from the LIFEPAK 500 AED



On July 18, 2006 Dean Cowles, center, experienced a heart attack followed by sudden cardiac arrest while in his office at Medtronic Emergency Response Systems in Redmond, Washington. Thanks to the quick action of his Team Members, his life was saved by CPR, defibrillation with a LIFEPAK 500 automated external defibrillator, and advanced emergency medical care. Also pictured are those involved in the rescue (from left), Steve Copeland, Kim Arnold, Mike McMahon, Steve Firman, Larry Ford, Ed Fallon and Oscar Rojas.

indicated the first shock was delivered 20 seconds after the power was turned on!" Ultimately the AED advised a second shock. By the time EMS (emergency medical services) arrived Dean was breathing on his own and had a steady pulse. Firman believes "Dean was probably defibrillated something like two minutes or less after Ed noticed him struggling to breathe."

Even though Medtronic maintains a Medical Emergency Response Team (MERT) and 9-1-1 was called immediately, Dean's chances could have been slim without the training and quick intervention of his coworkers. MERT members were on the scene within five minutes but the EMS vehicle didn't arrive for almost 10 minutes. And survival rates drop seven to 10 percent every minute defibrillation is delayed!

Now when he looks back, Dean realizes he had two episodes in the days leading up to his heart attack—brief periods of extreme tightness in his upper chest and shoulders. But they passed quickly and he just didn't get around to checking in with a doctor. "You think you know the symptoms of a heart attack, and it doesn't always feel like you expect. I was in total denial," he now says. (Continued on back.)

No longer a smoker, Dean jokes he “was unconscious for the worst part of quitting—the first three days. I woke up a non-smoker!” He is grateful for the cardiac rehabilitation program he is participating in because he’s learning not only about risk factors but also about nutrition and exercise. And he has support to stay with the lifestyle changes he needs to make. “No more bacon and eggs!” groans Dean. But he has also found that it is not just cutting out everything that tastes good. He’s finding ways to keep healthy and still take pleasure in eating. “It’s a matter of knowing how to take care of myself.”

Dean is deeply grateful for the employee AED program at Medtronic ERS. “Without that program I wouldn’t be here.” Dean’s wife, Diana and his sons, Dan and Ray, all plan to get CPR/AED certified.

Dean returned to work barely two weeks after his cardiac arrest. “I needed to get out of the house and stay busy.” A long-term employee, Dean has worked at Medtronic off-and-on for 30 years and takes great pride in his work. He has been a major player on some of the most reliable products Medtronic has produced and is currently on the Lifecycle Engineering Team for LIFEPAK 12 and 20 defibrillator/monitors. Product quality is his primary focus and now he has a personal reason to ensure Medtronic produces the highest quality AEDs.

Life is good for Dean. His philosophy carries him through the challenges of coming back from a near fatal episode: “Don’t sweat the small stuff—and this is all small stuff. I’m alive.”

LIFEPAK AEDs are prescription devices. Please consult your physician. AED users should be trained in CPR and the use of the AED. LIFEPAK AEDs are intended for use on adults and children of all ages. For infants and children less than 8 years of age or 55 lbs. (25 kg), use Infant/Child Reduced Energy Defibrillation Electrodes (available separately). Although not everyone can be saved from sudden cardiac arrest, studies show that early defibrillation can dramatically improve survival rates. For more information call Medtronic at 1.800.442.1142.

Medtronic Emergency Response Systems

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