

Panasonic: Ideas for Life

Panasonic's Ideas For Life brand concept embodies its commitment to creating innovative electronic products and solutions. Since the company implemented its automated external defibrillator (AED) program in the spring of 2001, it has a new meaning—the ability to save a life from sudden cardiac arrest.

Panasonic rolled out the first phase of its program at its corporate headquarters in Secaucus, New Jersey, with eight AEDs and 50 employees trained in CPR and AED use. August 2002 brought an event not soon to be forgotten: the medical unit nurse, Carole Garoffolo, R.N., a security officer and colleagues saved an employee's life—thanks to quick action, shocks from an AED, and emergency medical care.

Panasonic moved quickly to equip its major facilities with AEDs: within 2-3 months an additional 43 AEDs were placed in 24 company locations. Company leaders expect that as major business units join the holdings of Matsushita Electric Corporation of America (the North American hub of electronics giant Matsushita Electric Industrial Co., Ltd., which is best known by its Panasonic brand name) the AED program will also expand. Already, the company has more than 50 AEDs covering 24 sites, in close proximity to 4,000 employees, and with 240 trained volunteers who know how to use them.

Says Nancy Chrust, manager of benefits and employee services for the company's North American headquarters, "Saving one person is more meaningful than any expense incurred—and then more. That's the long and the short of it."



Championing AEDs for Panasonic

One day in the year 2000, Chrust's flight was delayed. As she waited in San Francisco International Airport, she saw an AED (automated external defibrillator) hanging on the wall, and asked what it was. She then remembered reading about AEDs in an airline magazine. "It's a fluke that I happened to be the one sitting in the San Francisco Airport looking at that AED," Chrust states modestly. "It was meant to be."

Upon returning to her office at corporate headquarters, Chrust spoke to her boss, William Schupp, vice president of human resources for North America. Ironically, he had recently read an article about AEDs and also wondered if such a program might be a good idea for Panasonic.

Phase One: Rolling Out the AED Program

With her VP's support, Chrust placed a call to the American Heart Association to get more information. "They came in, very unbiased, to teach us about AEDs. They demonstrated several units for us. I called one of our local medical centers and our emergency services to ask what they used, and to find out who could help us. The choice was LIFEPAK® defibrillators."

The American Heart Association helped Chrust and her colleagues launch the first phase of the program in the spring of 2001—outfitting corporate headquarters with AEDs. About 2000 people a day frequent the premises, including employees, visitors, contractors and building maintenance staff. "We gave them blueprints of our facility and asked for a recommendation for the number of units and placement. They did a thorough evaluation, and recommended eight units. They also recommended the number of people we should train in AED use. We already had people trained in CPR.

When asked about barriers to starting the program, Chrust responds, "Once it was determined that our use of the AEDs would be covered under the Good Samaritan Act, the company could be less concerned about liability."

Employees in the corporate headquarters of Matsushita Electric Corporation of America in Secaucus, New Jersey, understand the lifesaving potential of AEDs. Just over a year after the company rolled out the first phase of its AED program, an employee's life was saved from sudden cardiac arrest.

To announce and roll out the new program, and to recruit volunteers as trained responders, Chrust and her colleagues placed announcements on the company intranet and in the employee newsletter. They appealed to anyone interested in volunteering, especially people who were already CPR certified, who worked on volunteer emergency teams, and who had lifeguard training. They set up training and in two days, had 50 people trained—a mix of employees and security officers. "Security officers are important because they're always here, late at night and on weekends," Chrust says.

The program required administrative adjustments. First, the company amended its medical unit contract to include medical direction for the AED program. Carol Garoffolo, R.N., in the medical unit oversaw all the program details, such as who was trained and dates for refresher training. "As employees leave, we have to call on others to be trained," says Chrust. "There's no shortage of volunteers."

A Priceless Benefit: A Life Saved

"It's a sad fact, but like anything else, if you don't use something, no one knows it exists," says Chrust. August 2002 brought an event that she and her colleagues will always remember. An employee alerted the nurse that his colleague wasn't feeling or looking well. Nurse Garoffolo immediately went to assess the employee, and just after she arrived, he collapsed in sudden cardiac arrest.

The nurse began CPR and alerted security to call 9-1-1 and bring the AED. Three shocks were required to establish a life sustainable heartbeat, even before emergency personnel arrived. After a brief time in the hospital, the employee made a full recovery and returned to work.

“This was especially meaningful to me, because I’ve known this person for a long time,” says Chrust. “The word got out. Everybody was very impressed by the fact that the company cared enough to provide this program for its employees.”

Phase Two: Expanding the Program

Because of management’s awareness of the importance of AEDs we were given the green light to roll this program out to many of our locations throughout the U.S.

The magnitude of the project called for some help. In August 2002 Chrust contacted her sales representative at Medtronic. “We have a lot of locations,” Chrust says. “We could never have done it alone. We didn’t know the hospitals or regulations in all the different areas. Our contact at Medtronic helped set up what we’d already completed at Headquarters, only on a larger scale: medical authorization and oversight, training, tracking program details, help with paperwork—everything.”

A Lifesaving Commitment for the Future

Now 24 of the company’s U.S. facilities have AED programs in place, with more than 50 AEDs in close proximity to 4,000 employees, and 240 volunteers trained in CPR/AED use. “We will lease or purchase additional AEDs on an “as-needed” basis,” Chrust says.

“Starting the AED program was something that was very natural for us. If it’s available, why shouldn’t we have it? We’re very grateful we had an AED program in place when and where one of our employees needed it.”

“The word got out. Everybody was impressed by the fact that the company cared enough to provide this program [AEDs] for its employees.”

Nancy Chrust, manager of benefits and employee services, Matsushita Electric Corporation (best known by its Panasonic brand name)

For more information regarding AED programs, contact your Medtronic Physio-Control sales representative at 1.800.442.1142 or visit www.aedhelp.com.

LIFEPAK AEDs are prescription devices. AED users should be trained in CPR and use of the AED. Although not everyone can be saved from sudden cardiac arrest, studies show that early defibrillation can dramatically improve survival rates. LIFEPAK AEDs may be used on children up to eight years old or 25kg (55 lbs) only with the Infant/Child Reduced Energy Defibrillation Electrodes.



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