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100,000 Lives Can Be Saved Per Year in Europe: The New ERC Guidelines on Resuscitation

About 500,000 people suffer a sudden cardiac arrest every year in Europe. It is very easy to help those hearts which are mostly too young to die. Bystander cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) by lay people increases survival rate by 2-3 times, however, today it is delivered in only 1 in 5 hospital cardiac arrests. Increasing this rate will save 100,000 lives in Europe per year. The new 2010 CPR Guidelines from the European Resuscitation Council (ERC) will help to reach this goal.

On 18 October, the European Resuscitation Council (ERC) launched the new European Guidelines for cardiopulmonary resuscitation, based on new scientific evidence published since the last revision five years ago. For lay bystanders, the message is now very clear. Prof. Bernd Böttiger, Chairman of the ERC, pointed out: “Push fast and firmly, and start immediately! If the victim does not respond or react, press down at at least 5 cm on the middle of the chest, at a rate of at least 100 compressions per minute.”

The most important action in resuscitation is chest compression. Everyone – including children – can do this. This simple procedure is safe and markedly increases the victim’s chance of survival. Bystanders who are trained and willing should combine chest compressions with rescue breathing, at a ratio of 30 compressions to 2 breaths. However, chest compressions are most important even without breathing – without compressions the brain will suffer irreversible damage within 5 minutes following the collapse.

“Numerous studies on the effectiveness of resuscitation procedures have been reviewed for the new ERC Guidelines 2010, paying particular attention to convincing scientific evidence and simplification”, said Dr. Jerry Nolan, ERC Board member. Besides chest compression, another main focus today is automated external defibrillators (AEDs), which can now be widely found in public places. The new ERC Guidelines clearly recommend the use of these devices: AEDs are simple to use as voice prompts guide the user through the defibrillation process safely. Early defibrillation may, in addition to chest compressions, be a life saving procedure many cardiac arrest victims.

Furthermore, the ERC Guidelines 2010 confirm the importance of therapeutic hypothermia following cardiac arrest. Cooling the post arrest victim to 32-34°C for 12-24 hours significantly increases the chance of good neurological survival. However, surprisingly this simple method is still not used by many emergency medical services and hospitals in Europe. The 2010 ERC Guidelines now also recommend extending therapeutic hypothermia therapy to newborns suffering from lack of oxygen during birth. Immediate and hard chest compressions, early defibrillation, and cooling are the key factors of resuscitation in the new 2010 ERC Guidelines. Böttiger concluded: “We will save 100,000 lives per year in Europe, if all lay and professional people take part in this way, and care.”

Further information, full guidelines and posters for the public and healthcare professionals are available for free at www.erc.edu

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