CPR Saved my Life: Quick action from parents saves 20 year old's life



Em Seyb and their parents, Roger and Karyn, discovered this on the evening of 2 November 2020 when they saved Em's life with their fast response. Em and their family are sharing their story as part of the New Zealand Resuscitation Council's World Restart a Heart Day Campaign.

Em is a Massey University student studying a Bachelor of Communications, and in 2020 was enjoying student life working as a Residential Assistant.

Em was visiting their parents in Auckland and sitting with mum, Karyn on the couch watching the evening news while dad Roger was in the kitchen cooking dinner. "Em dropped their phone but when they didn't move to pick it up it alerted me to something going on" Karyn

remembers.

Em had gone into a cardiac arrest. Em's cardiologist explained the event to their family as an electrical storm on the heart which causes it to stop. This is different to a heart attack, which is a circulation problem blocking blood flow. A cardiac arrest is sudden and extremely fatal with a survival rate of only 13%.

Karyn called for Roger to help, at this time Karyn decided that she should call 111. Roger noted that he thought about starting CPR but found it difficult to make the decision to begin. He explains “the call taker was amazing, he was so calm and reassuring, he asked me to hold the phone next to Em’s face to hear their breathing. He told me to start CPR, and talked me through the entire CPR process.” Em was not breathing normally, so Roger was instructed to begin CPR.

This quick action from their parents saved Em’s life. Without CPR or a Defibrillator (AED), someone in cardiac arrest is 10% - 15% less likely to survive with each passing minute.

Help arrived quickly. From the start of the 111 call to the co-response arrival from Fire and Emergency and St John Ambulance staff, was about 7 minutes. Emergency Services took over CPR and Em received 2 shocks from an AED to restart their heart.

Em’s story is an example of the Chain of Survival operating perfectly to save lives. Through early recognition and calling 111, starting CPR and getting a defibrillator (AED) quickly, survival rates can be increased from out-of-hospital cardiac arrests. This process can be remembered as Call Push Shock. Roger commented that he thought about CPR but the hardest choice was making the decision to start. Karyn added that she wanted people to know that “you aren’t over exaggerating when calling 111.” A quick response saves lives.

The New Zealand Resuscitation Council encourages all people to refresh or learn CPR and find out where the closest AED is to their work and home through the AED Locations app or website.

A cardiac arrest can happen to anyone at any time and lives are saved when people know what to do.

Em’s memories in the weeks before and following the cardiac arrest are a bit patchy, and Em must rely on their family to fill in a few of the gaps.

Em is passionate to raise awareness about recognising a cardiac arrest, and how it’s completely different to a heart attack “people ask me if I had a heart attack and I have to explain that a cardiac arrest is different which surprises people.” Em also admitted that they

didn’t know what a cardiac arrest was before they had one. Em became very aware to check where the closest AED’s are to key locations such as work and home after their cardiac arrest.

The 16th of October is World Restart a Heart Day which is a global initiative promoted in 194 countries to improve out-of-hospital cardiac arrest survival rates through bystander CPR and public access defibrillation. AED’s are compact extremely safe and simple to use, they instruct the rescuer when to start CPR and guides the rescuer through the CPR steps. AED’s can increase the chances of surviving a cardiac arrest by up to 80%.

Em spent 13 days in Auckland Hospital, the first 36 hours were in an induced coma. When talking about their hospital stay, Em remembers that they were the youngest person on the cardiac ward, so enjoyed chatting to the nurses that were around their age. Because of their patchy memory Em couldn’t remember their trip to Auckland so thought they were still in Wellington. When Em woke up from the coma, they remember being confused about how much time had passed, and asking to see their partner, Izzy, who had travelled up from Wellington the morning after Em’s arrest.

Em had an Implantable Cardioverter-Defibrillator (ICD) installed in their chest. Em's doctors were unable to find the cause of the cardiac arrest. Em’s parents said the ICD provides some peace of mind “The cardiologist told Em that the device was installed so they could live their life and not be wrapped in cotton wool”. The ICD detects if Em has another abnormal heart rhythm and will administer a shock if they ever have another cardiac arrest.

Just 3 weeks after their cardiac arrest, Em was back in Wellington with Izzy, attending friends 21st birthday parties and moving into a new flat.

Thank you to Em, Karyn, and Roger for bravely sharing their story.