

Before I was born, while my mother was a young woman, she lost someone she was very close to, her friend Yui. Although Yui was young and healthy, she died unexpectedly of a cardiac arrest. My mother, a nurse, said that if there had been AEDs around at that time, she might have been saved.

AED stands for “automated external defibrillator”. It is a portable, life-saving medical device that delivers an electric shock to someone experiencing cardiac arrest. An AED is easy to use and even includes voice-guided instructions on how to operate it.

Did you know that Japan is one of the leading countries in the world in terms of AED ownership? Still, in Japan, out of all the people who experienced cardiac arrests outside of hospitals, AEDs were only used 4.3% of the time. I just said they were easy to use and so numerous, so why were they used so little?

One reason is that many people lack the courage to use AEDs even when they are close by. I wasn’t confident in my ability to use AEDs either. So, I took a course on how to use them. This training gave me the courage to use them. I believe that if more people have the courage to use AEDs, the usage rate of 4.3% will significantly increase.

So how can we get more people to have that courage? We already hold evacuation drills for earthquakes and fires regularly at schools. How about including AED training for students? If AED training is introduced to middle schools, eventually everyone will have the courage to operate this life-saving machine.

But this leaves us with another problem to solve. Is one nearby when it is needed? In 2011, Naoki Matsuda, a famous soccer player suddenly collapsed while practicing at a soccer field. The AED that was usually at the field had been lent out at that time and wasn’t available. Mr. Matsuda died as a result. Such a thing shouldn’t be allowed to happen again.

It is important that AEDs are located where they are supposed to be and it is also important that people know where AEDs are located. The Japanese Heart Foundation recommends that an AED be installed every 300 meters. So, what if AEDs are located next to post boxes, pay phones, traffic lights, and vending machines? Once they are more commonplace, they will be easier to recognize, and more importantly, easier to get to.

In closing, approximately 200 people a day in Japan die suddenly as a result of cardiac arrest brought on by severe irregular heartbeat. If this happened to you right now, an AED could save your life. If it happened to the person sitting next to you right now, if you had an AED nearby and just a little courage, YOU could save him or her. Thanks to the development of AEDs, even us middle school students can save people. We must make sure that we lose no more lives that could be saved. Lives like my mom’s friend, Yui, the soccer player, Mr. Matsuda, or the 200 people a day who could possibly be saved by AEDs. With AEDs in accessible locations and with people who have the courage to use them, we can save countless lives going forward.

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AEDs Can Save Lives