

Profile: Today's Health; Lynne Cheney and Dr. Jonathan Reiner discuss the need for defibrillators to be widely available

16 June 2009
NBC News: Today
TRANSCRIPT

DAVID GREGORY, co-host:

Back now at 8:42. This morning on TODAY'S HEALTH, sudden cardiac arrest. It kills more people each year than breast cancer, AIDS, house fires, handguns and traffic accidents combined. And now Lynne Cheney, wife of former Vice President Dick Cheney, and Dr. Jonathan Reiner, a heart attack expert at the George Washington University Hospital, are working on a solution.

Good morning to both of you.

Ms. LYNNE CHENEY (Wife of Former Vice President Dick Cheney): Good morning.

Dr. JONATHAN REINER (Heart Attack Expert, George Washington University Hospital): Good morning.

GREGORY: Thanks for being here.

Dr. Reiner, let me start with you. The most important fact about sudden cardiac arrest is that something can be done about it with a defibrillator right away.

Dr. REINER: Absolutely. This is an incredibly common problem in the United States, it happens once every two minutes, over 700 times a day, 300,000 times a year, and it's a supremely lethal event if untreated. Nationwide, the survival rate for out-of-hospital sudden cardiac arrest is only 7 percent, but the prompt use of an automatic external defibrillator can, especially if it's performed in the first three minutes, can increase survival rates to over 60 percent.

GREGORY: And what does it actually do?

Dr. REINER: A sudden cardiac arrest is usually caused by a chaotic, fast heart rhythm, and a defibrillator essentially resets the electrical circuitry, allowing the normal heart rhythm to resume and blood pressure to be restored.

TEXT:

Sudden Cardiac Arrest

SCA is Responsible For One Death Every Two Minutes

325,000 Deaths Per Year Equal to the Population of Pittsburgh

For More Information on How to Get More AEDs in Your Community, Go to ReStartDC.org

GREGORY: And, Mrs. Cheney, this is a really important message to get out. You've been working on making sure that these defibrillators are widely available. This hits very close to home, the former vice president has had four heart attacks in the past. What would you like to see happen?

Ms. CHENEY: Well, what Jonathan and I are working on through the Cheney Cardiovascular Institute at George Washington University is a program called ReStart DC...

GREGORY: Mm-hmm.

Ms. CHENEY: ...to be sure that these are easily available throughout the Washington area, including in parts of the city that often stand last in line when needs are being considered. We want them everywhere.

GREGORY: Places where they're not necessarily going to make the investment on their own.

Ms. CHENEY: Well, churches...

GREGORY: Mm-hmm.

Ms. CHENEY: ...synagogues, homes for the elderly, community centers. There are numerous places where these should be. And we hope that our program, ReStart DC, can be a model for other programs that might be started in other parts of the country.

GREGORY: Doctor, I just want to have people look at this as well, this actual device.

Dr. REINER: Yeah.

GREGORY: And the important message here we were talking about just a moment ago, you don't need training.

Dr. REINER: No.

GREGORY: That can't be said enough, right?

Dr. REINER: This is a fire extinguisher, and in fact it's easier to use than a fire extinguisher. And unlike a fire extinguisher, when you turn this device on, it talks to you.

Voice of Defibrillator: Begin by removing all clothing from the patient's chest. Cut clothing if needed.

GREGORY: Wow.

Dr. REINER: I'll turn this off so that it doesn't continue to go.

GREGORY: OK.

Dr. REINER: But essentially all you need to do to treat a patient is to open this up, there are two patches in here, you peel one patch off, put it on one side of the chest, the other patch goes on the other side of the chest. The device automatically interrogates the rhythm and it will prompt you if the patient needs a shock. Very importantly, you cannot hurt a patient with this device, it will not deliver a shock to someone who does not need one.

Ms. CHENEY: Mm-hmm.

GREGORY: That's an important point.

Dr. REINER: The only way you can hurt somebody is by not attempting to use this...

GREGORY: Right.

Dr. REINER: ...in a person who has sudden cardiac arrest. This is--this device is made for everyone. If you've been trained, terrific...

GREGORY: Right.

Dr. REINER: ...if you're going to get trained, also terrific, but if you've never seen this device, you can use

this.

Ms. CHENEY: Mm-hmm.

Dr. REINER: There was a study several years ago which compared sixth grade kids who have never seen the device to paramedics, and the sixth grade kids were able to deliver a shock as fast as the paramedics.

GREGORY: Wow. Wow. It's important--go ahead.

Ms. CHENEY: And Jonathan and I have heard so many fantastic stories of people who have survived sudden cardiac arrest. There was one fellow you and I were visiting with who was in his health club, he watched someone else die of sudden cardiac arrest, made sure the health club got an external defibrillator, was running on a treadmill himself six months later, fell over in sudden cardiac arrest and was saved by the defibrillator he'd insisted upon.

GREGORY: Wow.

Mrs. Cheney, before I let you go, there are a lot of life and death matters that you care about, including national security, and your husband, a former vice president, has certainly been outspoken on that topic. The head of the CIA, Leon Panetta, had some very pointed language about your husband in a New Yorker piece; he said that he thinks `the former vice president smells blood in the water on the national security issue, it's almost as if he's wishing that this country would be attacked again in order to make his point. I think that's dangerous policy.' Would you like to react to that?

Ms. CHENEY: Well, David, I hate to bring you the news, but Leon came out yesterday afternoon and said that, you know, he certainly didn't mean to imply at all that Dick Cheney wasn't totally interested in the safety and security of the American people, which, of course, is what...

GREGORY: Mm-hmm.

Ms. CHENEY: ..Dick has been interested in for most of his life. And what Jonathan and I are interested in right now, safety, saving lives, being sure that Americans can live long and productive and well and happily.

GREGORY: All right. Thanks, Mrs. Cheney, Dr. Reiner. Thank you both very much.

Dr. REINER: Thanks, David.

GREGORY: And coming next, we'll step into the kitchen to whip up some tasty fish tacos. But first, this is TODAY on NBC.