

Office Defibrillator Saves A Life

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Jennifer Fergusson had a hectic morning last fall.

"I just saw myself lying on my desk from above," she said. "I saw myself lying on my desk and I could hear someone calling me behind me, but I couldn't respond."

At just 39, Fergusson was in full-fledged cardiac arrest. She was clinically dead.

"I know I was going towards this beautiful light, and in front of that light, my father was standing in front of the light. My father's passed on 14 years now, and I'm going toward the light and I'm saying, 'Daddy, it's so good to see you,'" Fergusson said.

But that Monday morning in October was not Fergusson's day to die, thanks in large part to her co-workers.

"I came running back from my office over to her location, her boss and I pulled out her chair, turned it and yelled for additional help," said Terri Straub, Fergusson's co-worker at the Greater New York Hospital Association.

Within seconds, Straub had started CPR on Fergusson. That prevented brain damage, but it wasn't going to bring Fergusson back to life.

The other thing that saved Fergusson's life that day was a remarkable piece of technology that the Greater New York Hospital Association has had in its offices for 4 years.

It's called an automatic external defibrillator.

"It's one of those things you're glad you have, hope you'll never need and you don't think you'll ever need -- thank God we have it," said GNYHA worker David Rosenfeld.

Rosenfeld was trained in using the AED. He put the pads on Fergusson's chest, and the machine took over.

The AED read Fergusson's EKG automatically, and could tell she was in ventricular fibrillation. Her heart wasn't pumping at all -- just quivering. It tells people to stand clear, and shocks the patient. It took five shocks to get Fergusson's heart started again.

"There was nothing else to do. I just kept doing it until the paramedics showed up," Rosenfeld said.

New York state law requires AEDs in public schools, state buildings and health clubs, but the American Heart Association wants them in all public places -- like airports, stadiums and office buildings.

"The reason for that is for every minute that goes by, there's a 10 percent less chance of survival," said Robert Collins, of the American Heart Association.

"I'm extremely blessed," Fergusson said. "I don't even like to say lucky -- I like to say blessed that my heavenly father was smiling, my father above was smiling, my biological father, and just the people here at the association and just the fact that we have defibrillators in the office, is simply a miracle."