The Australian Resuscitation Council (ARC) readily supports such initiatives that highlight the importance of resuscitation in our community.

Being the first edition of "Heartstart Times" for some years, this presents an ideal opportunity to inform readers about the ARC. This year marks the 25th anniversary of the ARC. The council comprises representation from various community, nursing and medical organisations that are involved in many aspects of resuscitation. The ARC has branches in every Australian State. As the national co-ordinating body, the role of the ARC is to evaluate the scientific evidence surrounding resuscitation, develop appropriate guidelines and disseminate this information to the wider community. This is a continual process as new scientific evidence becomes available necessitating the revision of existing guidelines. The ARC is also a founding member of the International Liaison Committee on Resuscitation (ILCOR).

In addition to the publication of resuscitation guidelines, the ARC has produced numerous publications and hosted three very successful international conferences. The next conference will be held in April 2002.

Further information regarding the ARC, including how to subscribe and contact information, can be obtained from the ARC office on (03) 9249 1214. Congratulations on revitalising "Heartstart Times" and I look forward to being a regular contributor.

Dr Ian Jacobs
National Chairman
Australian Resuscitation Council

Melbourne study shows the value of early defibrillation

A review of cardiac arrests attended by St John Ambulance Australia personnel provides further proof of the benefits of rapid response and early defibrillation. Over 7 years, 28 cardiac arrests occurred at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) during major public events and at the Shrine of Remembrance on Anzac Day. Using a tiered-response strategy, St John personnel successfully resuscitated nearly 90% of the patients at the venue and 70% were subsequently discharged home from hospital.

St John volunteers have provided first aid services at the MCG for more than 30 years and at the Shrine for over 10 years. In an effort to maximise survival following resuscitation, St John implemented a co-ordinated three-tiered response strategy at these venues during 1989. Based on the ‘Chain of Survival’, this involved basic life support (BLS) delivered by general first aiders, a rapid response cardiopulmonary resuscitation and defibrillation (CPR-D) team, and a medical response team to initiate advanced cardiovascular life support (ACLS) procedures. The CPR-D teams were deployed so that they could respond to any collapsed person within 5 minutes. Although manual defibrillation was initially used, semi-automated external defibrillators were introduced in 1994 and quickly became part of standard procedures.

The review of the first 28 cardiac arrests attended, which was published in the medical journal Resuscitation, clearly showed the strategy's value. Overall, 24 patients (86%) left the venues alive and 20 (71%) subsequently survived to discharge. ACLS was available in less than 7 minutes in 5 cases and within 18 minutes in 21 cases. These survival rates are markedly higher than the accepted benchmarks – discharge survival rates for similar situations are about half this, ranging from 20 to 40%. As a result, the authors are advocating wider community use of semi-automated external defibrillators by appropriately trained first responders.

If you would like to read more about the study, the full citation is: Wassenheit J, Keane G, Fisher N, Leditschke JF. Cardiac arrest outcomes at the Melbourne Cricket Ground and Shrine of Remembrance using a tiered response strategy – a forerunner to public access defibrillation. Resuscitation 2000; 44: 97–104. Or you can obtain the abstract from MEDLINE by logging on to: www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed.

You were asking?

What does an ECG measure?

An electrocardiogram, or ECG, measures the electrical activity of the heart. Heartbeats are the result of electrical activity in the cells of the heart. Electrical impulses cause the muscles of the heart to contract and relax in a regular rhythm creating the pumping action that moves the blood through the body. An ECG can give a great deal of information about heart’s health, such as detecting disturbances in the heart’s rhythm or rate.

Quiz Question

The terms heart attack and sudden cardiac arrest are some times used interchangeably. Are they the same?