

# Push for defibrillators in offices, factories

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Stockbroker David Browne had long supported first-aid education in the office. A portable defibrillator saved his life. *Photo: Simon O'Dwyer*

## **A few thousand dollars can be the difference between life and death.**

STOCKBROKER David Browne drives a sleek, silver-grey sports car and owns one of the top wineries on the Bellarine Peninsula. But the best money he ever spent was less than \$5000 for a small plastic box of cables and buttons to put in his Collins Street office.

That investment, made about three years ago, saved his life.

Mr Browne, 63, runs Australia's oldest stockbroking company, Tolhurst Group. On Friday, March 27 this year, he'd chaired an animated, often acrimonious meeting in its 15th-floor boardroom. When it finished, he was looking forward to a calming cup of tea. He remembers beginning to pour one and then... nothing.

He was dropped by a sudden cardiac arrest. His heart stopped and he was, for a while, dead. But he had always encouraged first-aid courses for the company's 200 employees, bringing in tutors to teach cardiopulmonary resuscitation or CPR, and the like: "And I think one of them said to me that if we were going to do CPR, why not go the whole hog."

So Mr Browne had bought the office an automated external defibrillator, a portable electronic device that can be attached to someone who has suffered a cardiac attack.

It automatically diagnoses their condition and, if necessary, delivers a dose of electric energy to "shock" their heart back into a normal rhythm. About 20 of the staff were trained to use it.

"This might sound like hindsight, but the demographic of stockbroking, with the tension that arises, is probably a monte for somebody, somewhere, to have this sort of problem," says Mr Browne. "I just didn't expect to be the first guinea pig."

As a colleague began CPR, another ran for the defibrillator. The electrode pads were placed on his chest, one just below his right collarbone and the other on the left side over his lower ribs. Voice prompts on the machine told the operator that a shock was needed and to push the button to deliver it. Mr Browne's heart began beating and he started breathing again.

The first ambulance paramedics, Dean Jensen and Desmond Keane, arrived on the scene at 10 minutes after receiving the call. As they walked in the door, Mr Browne's heart stopped again and they shocked him to restart it. But Mr Jensen says that without that initial defibrillation, Mr Browne would almost certainly have died.

Research has shown that every minute a person with sudden cardiac arrest waits for treatment with a defibrillator, their chance of survival decreases by about 10 per cent.

Sudden cardiac arrests kill most people. According to Ambulance Victoria, there are about 4000 cardiac arrests in Victoria each year. In

Melbourne, only 54 per cent of victims make it to hospital alive and only about two in 10 survive. And that is one of the best survival rates in the world. Since his scare Mr Browne has Googled the statistics and found a global survival rate of about 4 per cent.

Lack of quick access to CPR and defibrillation is a main reason for the high mortality.

Since the 1990s there has been a gradual trend to public access defibrillation, putting easy-to-use semi-automatic defibrillators in places where crowds gather. The State Government has funded about 60 of the machines in 16 places, including 27 at Melbourne Airport, 14 at CBD train stations; and others at Melbourne Zoo, Federation Square, Healesville Sanctuary, the Shrine of Remembrance and community leisure centres.

But, apart from big shopping centres, private enterprise has been slow to embrace the life-saving devices. Ambulance Victoria, which is promoting an online registration system for the companies that have them, says their placement in workplaces still appears "minimal" — so far, only 100 businesses have applied for registration.

"That's sad," says Mr Browne. "Prices now are down to about \$2500 — for a few thousand bucks, what an insurance policy to have.

"The knock-on effect of the sort of thing that happened to me is pretty horrible. A mate of mine had a staff member die in his office some years ago. The trauma that wrought on the assembled staff was not only significant in emotional terms, but resulted in thousands of dollars being spent on remedial action for their heads."

Rowan Harman, one of the Mobile Intensive Care Ambulance paramedics who responded to Mr Browne's cardiac arrest, says putting defibrillators in offices, factories, building sites and other workplaces could save an enormous number of lives.

"They're easy to use, you're prompted all the way, you don't need any medical knowledge... All it needs is someone to grab that machine and turn it on."

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