

Compulsory CPR urged for high schools

Can hike survival rate by almost four times

By BRENDA BRANSWELL, The Gazette July 8, 2010

A charitable foundation that helps set up CPR training programs in high schools across Canada says Quebec should make it compulsory for students to learn the life-saving technique.

The Advanced Coronary Treatment (ACT) Foundation has set up the CPR program in 75 per cent of Quebec's public high schools, partly with financial help from the provincial government.

But the one thing Quebec hasn't done is to make it a mandatory part of the curriculum as Ontario, Manitoba and Alberta have, says Sandra Clarke, the foundation's executive director. "If the government doesn't put it in the curriculum, then over time -with changing priorities, changing personnel and so on -it will gradually fall away."

A provincial coroner recommended last week that the Education Department look at offering a CPR course at the high school level. The recommendation came from a public inquiry into the death of Yanick Charpentier, 12, who collapsed after being punched in a schoolyard in St. Eustache in 2007.

"The Quebec government is in a perfect position to easily make this a reality, since 75 per cent of Quebec high schools already have the resources they need and the teacher training to do it," Clarke said.

A spokesperson for the Education Department said Quebec prefers to leave it up to school communities to choose the method of training that best responds to their milieu. CPR training is generally offered in the physical education and health course or as an extracurricular activity, said Ahissia Ahua.

The ACT Foundation works in partnership with the Quebec government, which Clarke said has been very supportive, providing \$600,000 for mannequins that are used in the training.

The foundation donates a class set of 30 mannequins to each participating high school, which must commit to train all its students before graduation. It also arranges and pays for teacher training, bringing in an outside agency to train teachers to be CPR instructors for their students. In Montreal and Laval, Urgences Sante provides the training free, Clarke said.

Research shows that survival rates for out-of-hospital cardiac arrest can increase by almost four times if CPR is started quickly at the scene, Clarke said.

Yet at best the Heart and Stroke Foundation estimates that probably no more than 15 per cent of Canadians overall know how to administer CPR. "Canada's rate of bystander CPR is abysmal," said Dr. Laurie Morrison, spokesperson for the foundation.

The Quebec Heart and Stroke Foundation plans to develop training by next January for elementary students that will be offered by its instructors. For the first few grades, the training could involve, for example, safety at home and school and calling 911, said Michel Viau, the foundation's provincial coordinator in emergency cardiovascular care. But students in Grades 5 and 6 are strong enough to do CPR, he added.

The ACT Foundation would like to see everyone learn CPR. "Who wants to be in that position of not knowing the simple skills that could save a life," Clarke said.

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