



Swift work – and a defibrillator – saves Central Coast grandfather

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The staff of the Crowne Plaza Terrigal had never used a defibrillator, except on dummies in training, and venue manager Chris Beath admitted he was “petrified”.

Yet swift work by Beath and duty manager Diandra Jones has saved the life of popular local shop-owner Tony Collins.

The drama started when Tony, 64, was enjoying a beer with friends at the establishment’s Florida Beach Bar. Tony remembers standing to announce it was time to go home.

“I don’t remember anything after that,” he told Cardiac Responder. “I didn’t feel sick, or faint. I was very relaxed, it was a beautiful day. But apparently I collapsed and my head hit the table.”

By contrast, Chris remembers absolutely every detail. “As soon as I saw Tony I could see he was struggling,” said the 35 year old, “so I ran to get our emergency first aid kit, which has the ‘defib’ and oxygen and other things.

“When I got out to him he was unconscious, face full of vomit, slumped in his chair, still breathing but unconscious.”

So great was the contrast when we caught up with Tony just two weeks later, he was able to joke about it as he walked to school to pick up his grandson. “I’ve got a lot to thank these lovely people for, as I’m told I wasn’t a pretty sight.”

Chris takes up the story. “We knew people had called the ambulance but we were just kind of monitoring him. I noticed that intermittently his breathing would stop. But it was coming back again.

“I got a little bit worried and, as a precaution, I got the defibrillator out and popped the pads on his chest. I had everyone in the background telling us we were going to kill him by trying to shock him while he was still alive. But we had done the training and knew we could put the pads on anyone and the machine is not going to do anything unless it needs to.”

Chris said by the time he had the pads on, it was no longer a precaution. The machine sensed Tony’s heart had stopped and immediately went to work.

“It shocked him once. We commenced CPR from there, but after two minutes of CPR he still had no heartbeat so it shocked him again. We commenced CPR for another two minutes and during that two minutes he was showing signs of life – a bit. We continued to do CPR until the ambulance officers arrived and they jumped in.”

Assisting Chris in every way was duty manager Diandra Jones. “When Chris ran inside to grab our defib from behind the front desk,” she told Cardiac Responder, “I got two of Tony’s friends to help move him off his tall bar stool, down onto the ground. Then we rolled him on his side, still vomiting. I found a bit of a pulse. We decided to put the oxygen on him but lost the pulse.

“Chris put the pads on Tony ... the defib is amazing, it tells you when it is preparing for shock, then it tells you when to resume the compressions. The ambulance officers got there in nine minutes and ... they worked on him and took him to Gosford Hospital, but there is no doubt the machine saved his life.”

Tony saw nothing of the huge effort that went into action on his behalf. “The only thing I remember is that I was fighting something, but I didn’t know what it was I was fighting. I thought I can’t beat this, so I’ll just give up.

“I can’t remember getting a shock, and I know I couldn’t see anything. Apparently during an angiogram my heart stopped again and they had to shock me a third time.”

Oddly, the one thing Tony did recall later was a vague sensation he was travelling in a helicopter. That was true, he had been airlifted on the Thursday evening to the Royal North Shore Hospital in Sydney.

“I woke up in intensive care, some time on the next morning, got out of bed and started talking to the nurses. Until they explained, I didn’t know what had happened to me.”

Tony said he is amazed at his good fortune. He is delighted there are now defibrillators at hotels, train stations and other public places. Still, he’d like to see more of them – and not just because of his personal experience. His daughter, Kelly, lost her husband, Matt, to a cardiac arrest. Matt was just 33.

“I’m very glad I did survive,” said Tony, “because Matt died in February three years ago and the day this happened to me, the 14th April, that would have been their 10th wedding anniversary. It would have been too much.”

Chris Beath has thought a lot about his first use of a defibrillator in a real life emergency. “Although I was petrified, the machine came to life and did what it needed to do and instructed us through it. I couldn’t speak more highly of the system. Without it, obviously Tony would have lost his life, and I don’t know how I would have been if we hadn’t been able to bring him back.”

Chris said he knew Tony as a regular customer. “Since then we’ve struck up a bit of a friendship, because, well, when you go through an experience like that together...”

Soon afterwards, the Crowne Plaza Terrigal’s general manager, Lachlan Walker, ordered two more defibrillators.

“I’m incredibly proud of our staff’s speedy response to the emergency,” he said, adding that the incident had made them realise that with such a large establishment, over such a wide area, “every second counts”.

He says having defibrillators is a vital part of providing “a safe environment and the best care for all our guests.”

NB: A Heartsafe Zone starts with a defibrillator system – not just a defibrillator. In other words, the defibrillator is monitored 24 hours a day for presence and functionality. Ongoing services ensure that, when cardiac arrest strikes, people are “aware of” and “confident to use” the defib and have the peace of mind that can only be provided with around-the-clock emergency back-up.



Angela Farr-Jones, Relationship Manager of CARDIAC Responder, and Tony Collins at the Imperial Centre, Gosford.