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BUSINESS

Smartphones called on for medical emergencies

Doctors caution that applications for dealing with life-threatening situations aren't a substitute for actual emergency care.

By PAMELA LEWIS DOLAN, amednews staff. *Posted Feb. 24.*

Medical emergency applications for smartphones are finding their way into the marketplace for consumers.

A recent entrant is AED Nearby, an application to help users locate the nearest automated external defibrillator.

Launched in January by the First Aid Corps, a group of volunteers trained to provide resuscitation in case of cardiac arrest, AED Nearby will help users locate the nearest defibrillator when sudden cardiac arrest occurs. The application works in conjunction with a GPS system to identify the user's location and direct him or her to the nearest device.

Several other applications for emergency situations have launched in recent months, including the Pocket First Aid & CPR Guide, developed by the American Heart Assn.

Methodist missionary Dan Woolley of Colorado Springs, Colo., credited the application for saving his life when he was trapped in a building for more than 60 hours after the Jan. 12 earthquake in Haiti. Woolley said he was able to use the application to learn how to fashion a tourniquet and bandage to treat his broken leg, and slow the bleeding from a head wound while he waited to be rescued.

Bret A. Nicks, MD, assistant medical director of the Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center's Dept. of Emergency Medicine, said some useful applications have been built around the ICE (in case of emergency) concept. First responders can activate the ICE application not only to determine whom to contact but also to access any information, such as medical conditions and drug allergies, that can be used by the physician treating them.

Members of the American College of Emergency Physicians said they have found some of the consumer applications useful but added that they should be used with caution.

"If you don't know the setting or the background behind the information, sometimes it can be misinterpreted," said Ryan Stanton, MD, an ACEP spokesman and emergency physician at UK Healthcare, affiliated with the University of Kentucky's medical school. "We don't want people sitting home or out of the ER when they have an emergent condition just because the iPhone or application says they don't need to seek help or they think they've treated it."

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