Sudden Cardiac Arrest versus Heart Attack Knowing the difference can save lives

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According to research from the Heart Rhythm Society, more than 70 percent of Americans believe sudden cardiac arrest, SCA, is a type of heart attack. It's like comparing apples and oranges. The common misunderstanding between SCA and a heart attack can lead people to overlook important risk factors that contribute to SCA.

So what is the difference? In basic terms, SCA is an electrical malfunction of the heart, while a heart attack is a blockage in the blood vessels interrupting the flow of blood to the heart – essentially an "electrical vs. plumbing" problem. Knowing the difference could help save thousands of lives each year.

Unfortunately, not only is SCA misunderstood, it's severely underestimated. SCA is a leading cause of death in the United States, taking more than 250,000 lives each year. Unknown by many, SCA claims more lives annually than breast cancer, lung cancer or AIDS.

In an effort to raise awareness about SCA and promote better heart health, the Heart Rhythm Society, an organization representing specialized clinicians trained to treat heart rhythm disorders, has launched a multi-year campaign aimed at helping individuals identify risk factors, understand how to properly respond and how to effectively prevent and treat SCA. Chief among its priorities, the Heart Rhythm Society hopes to help people better understand SCA, and is working to eliminate the confusion between SCA and a heart attack.

"Sudden cardiac arrest is a serious health issue. Unfortunately, the public knows little about SCA, such as whom it affects and what can be done to prevent it," says Richard L. Page, MD, FHRS, president of the Heart Rhythm Society. "The Heart Rhythm Society would like to encourage all Americans to learn more about SCA by becoming aware of preventative and responsive techniques that will ultimately save lives."

The Heart Rhythm Society offers the following tips and advice.

Who is at risk of SCA?
The following risk factors may indicate an increased risk of SCA:
* Previous heart attack
* Family history of sudden death, heart failure or heart attack
* Abnormal heart rate or rhythm
* Unusually rapid heart rate that comes and goes
* Episodes of fainting
* Low Ejection Fraction (less than 35 percent) – a measurement of how much blood is pumped by the ventricles with each heart beat

How to respond to SCA.

Time is critical. The Heart Rhythm Society advises the following swift actions in response to SCA:

* Know the signs of SCA – victims will fall to the ground, become unresponsive and will not breathe normally, if at all
* Call 911
* Administer CPR – hands-only CPR is proven to be just as effective
* Use an automated external defibrillator (AED) if one is available

How to prevent SCA.

The Heart Rhythm Society offers the following advice to decrease the likelihood of SCA:
* Live a healthy lifestyle
* Know your family history
* Know your risk of heart failure
* Treat and monitor health conditions that can contribute to heart problems, including high blood pressure, cholesterol, and smoking
* Seek professional guidance to control or stop an abnormal heart rhythm

For more information please visit www.HRSonline.org [1].

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Source: The Heart Rhythm Society

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