

LIFE STARTS AT 53 FOR ERIC

Eric Knowles says the availability of a defibrillator at Football NSW in Valentine Sports Park definitely contributed to saving his life when he suffered a sudden cardiac arrest in September 2015.

It was just four days before his 53rd birthday that Eric suddenly collapsed while watching his son's soccer team playing in their final. The last thing he remembers is getting up to step over the seats when the game finished.

Luckily for Eric, two off-duty nurses were at the game. They performed CPR for more than eight minutes, while also using the club's defibrillator.

"The chance of a person surviving a Ventricular Fibrillation (VF) arrest – which is what I had – is 9%," Eric said.

"I believe that if all public venues had defibrillators installed, that percentage would be greatly increased."

Eric was rushed to Westmead Hospital, where he later underwent a triple bypass. His memories are hazy around what went on around him during the incident.

"The only thing that comes to mind is I remember the face of an ambulance officer, and I have a short memory of being prepared for an angiogram at the hospital," Eric said.

"I have no recollection of anything else from the time of the attack on Saturday 12 September to waking up in intensive care on Thursday 17 September."

Eight months on, Eric is still feeling the effects of his VF arrest, with constant tiredness and ongoing aches and pains.

"There are some things I will never be able to do again and I have some mild short term memory loss," he said.

"I'm also a Type 1 Diabetic of 40 years – but I'm here and I'm alive and I have lost 15 kilograms."

Eric points out that when someone has a cardiac arrest, there is also a major impact on their family.

"My wife has had to deal with financial issues and maintaining the house, as well as keeping the family strong," he said.

"It upset my 85-year-old father a lot, and although we used our usual coping skills and joked about my 'jumping the queue', I know this affected him greatly.

"My three brothers have all had checkups to make sure their hearts are in order, and in general I think a lot of people around me just seem to take little more notice what they do health wise."

Eric encourages all club owners to install a defibrillator, and says people shouldn't feel afraid to use them.

“A defibrillator is fool proof – it won’t work if the heart has a rhythm and you can’t hurt anyone by using it,” he said.

“Given that an ambulance could take several minutes to arrive, an individual has a greater chance of survival if a defibrillator is on site at your venue.”

For now, Eric is taking each day as it comes while he works on sorting his life out health-wise and on the home front.

“I’m not working the long hours I used to, am walking nearly every day and I look at life differently now with the attitude that you should live for the moment and try not to put things off,” he said.

“I would also like to help the MHF in its endeavours to promote defibrillators in venues, and I hope that sharing my story and its positive outcome helps to encourage the installation of defibrillators in all venues.

ENDS

The Michael Hughes Foundation donated a defibrillator to Football NSW’s Valentines Sports Park, Glenwood in 2015, from the fundraising efforts of Remember Mike and Save a Life Dinner in October 2014.

The Michael Hughes Foundation was established in honour of Michael Hughes who passed away in 2013 from sudden cardiac arrest at 38 years of age. The aims of the Foundation are to raise awareness of sudden cardiac arrest, the placement of defibrillators in the community and turning bystanders into first responders.

For more information, visit www.mhf.life