



34 Year Old Cardiac Arrest Victim Saved At Lidcombe Station

A Sydney father of three survived a massive heart attack at Lidcombe Railway Station thanks to a Cardiac Responder state-of-the-art automated external defibrillator. The unit was used by the manager on duty to save a life.

“He’s my soulmate. I’m so happy he’s still alive. If he’d died . . . me and my kids . . . I don’t know what we’d do.”

These heartfelt words from Patricia Barnes, 32, are a solemn reminder of how important it has been for Railcorp to install Cardiac Responder automated external defibrillators at Sydney railway stations. Just after midnight on 4 December, Patricia’s fiancé - Michael Gordon, 34 - had a massive heart attack on Lidcombe railway station.

Luckily, a bystander knew first aid. And - importantly for Michael - there was an AED within easy reach, just seconds away in the station manager’s office. Railcorp back shift duty manager Ray Warlow tells what happened.

“About 12:30 PM I was informed by a cleaner that there was a man down on the number four platform.

“I ran down and saw a man performing CPR.

“I thought ‘well, that’s taken care of’. So I raced upstairs to grab the defibrillator.

“Within two or three minutes of seeing him we had a machine on him. Within five minutes we’d shocked him.”

And that meant the difference between life and death for Michael, who had been on his way home from a night out in the city. Michael has a history of heart disease. He had his first heart attack at just 30 years old. The former labourer is now unable to work because of his illness. His mother died of a massive heart attack, and his father had to have triple bypass surgery.

In April, Michael - a father of two children with Patricia, and caring for two others - is scheduled to have his own heart bypass surgery. The following month, in May - when Michael has fully recovered - he and Patricia plan to marry.

For Patricia, the ordeal began with a phone call at 2 AM.

“They told me he was in Auburn Hospital.

“I rang my brother and sister-in-law and they took me.

“I was so scared. He had breathing tubes in and everything.

“I thought he was going to die.”

But Michael didn’t die. Around 6:30 that same morning, doctors transferred Michael to Westmead Hospital. Patricia followed then spent every day for the

next week and a half by Michael's bedside, while her niece took care of the children. Now, Michael is recovering at home.

Railcorp installed its first automated external defibrillator in June 2009. By the end of July, 70 defibrillators - just like the one that saved Michael - had been installed at Sydney's busiest stations, with more following in the months to December. So far 87 AED systems have been installed.

A further 17 AED systems are still to be fitted on Countrylink trains, making a total of 104 systems in all. That's welcome news for Railcorp's chief health officer Armand Casolin.

"We (cater for) close to 1,000,000 passenger journeys each day," says Casolin. "That's a lot of people that use our network, and not all of them are well."

Sudden cardiac arrest is believed to be the leading cause of death in the industrial world, with more than 30,000 Australian fatalities each year. Swift access to an AED system is paramount: Every minute wasted means there is less chance of survival. But while access to the defibrillator is important, backup can also be vital. Casolin explains.

"Cardiac Responder come out and instruct staff how to use (the AED).

"And the full monitoring system gives us assurance that the device will be working when we need it.

"The last thing you want is an emergency, only to find out the device is not working.

"Cardiac Responder knows straight away the device has been moved and phone you to see what is happening."

In fact, the Cardiac Responder system has full support and backup, including despatching an emergency signal to authorities as needed.

That personal level of service made all the difference to duty manager and rescuer Ray Warlow, who used an AED on Michael Gordon at Lidcombe station.

"All the training paid off. I had general first aid. But since then, I have had specific training for this unit. It's not hard to use, talks you through, and it's all there ready to go."

Railcorp's rollout of the AED system is a first in Australia for the rail industry.

"I think it is good Railcorp has taken the lead," says Casolin. "Even though we haven't finished rolling them out, they have already saved a life."