

OUT-OF-HOSPITAL CARDIAC ARREST



Out-of-hospital cardiac arrest (OHCA) is a leading cause of death in Singapore, which accounts for more than 2,500 deaths annually. Once OHCA has occurred, the chance of survival reduces by up to 10% for every minute without chest compressions and defibrillation.

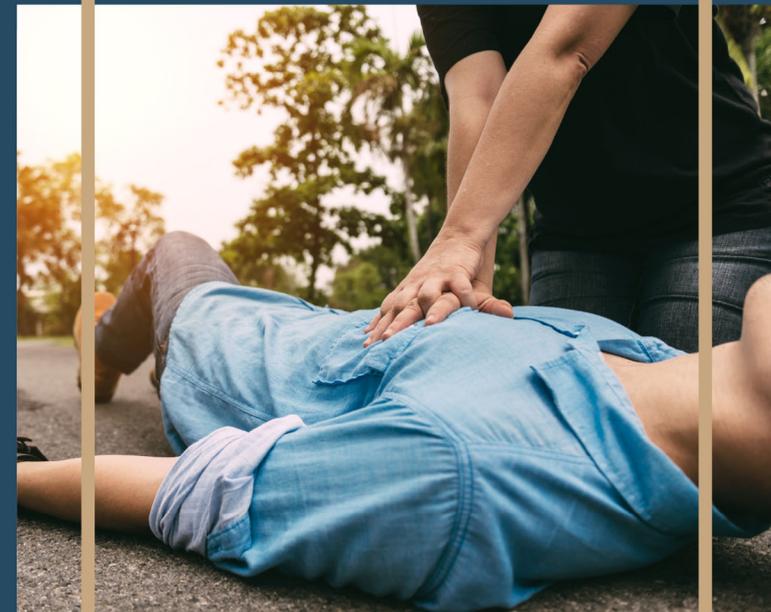
The greatest challenge to raise the OHCA survival rate in Singapore, is not only the lack of knowledge of CPR+AED, but predominantly the fear of being sued if the casualty suffers from an adverse outcome.

For more information on the CPR+AED certification course, please call the Singapore Heart Foundation at **6354 9371** or email cpraed@heart.org.sg.

If you face a legal issue arising from your resuscitation attempt and wish to seek legal advice but are unable to afford a private lawyer, you may contact Law Society Pro Bono Services at **6536 0650** to make an appointment for a free legal consultation at the Community Legal Clinics.

RESUSCITATION ATTEMPTS:

LEGAL AND ETHICAL ISSUES



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Is there a Good Samaritan Law in Singapore? If not, why?

A Good Samaritan is a rescuer who responds in an emergency when there is no legal responsibility to do so. This excludes healthcare professionals who care for patients in a clinical setting and owe their patients a duty of care.

Good Samaritan laws are aimed at absolving rescuers from liability should the rescuer's attempt to help a stranger fail, or make matters worse.

There is no Good Samaritan law enacted in Singapore. Currently, there is little evidence to support the claim that the absence of a Good Samaritan law is what deters would-be rescuers, or that enacting a Good Samaritan law would necessarily encourage more bystanders to help a stranger in need.



Can I be sued if the casualty dies after my resuscitation attempt?

The law requires Good Samaritans to act reasonably. Although would-be rescuers may have noble intentions, they must not behave recklessly or negligently in a way which could cause even more injury. However, there have been no reports locally of successful claims being made against Good Samaritans. A claimant would have to prove that if the attempt to help the casualty was not made, the casualty would have been better off. This would be difficult to prove, if indeed the casualty was truly in dire need of help and intervention.

Even if you are a trained medical professional, the law will take into account the constraints you face when rendering urgent medical attention in such situations - for example, the fact that you have no access to resuscitative drugs or devices, or hospital facilities. The law will not assume that just because you have medical training, you must save the patient and failing to do so would constitute evidence of negligence.

Can I be sued if I cause the casualty to suffer a physical injury after my resuscitation attempt?

So long as you apply CPR in accordance with proper techniques, there should be no liability, even if the casualty were to sustain injuries that are known complications of CPR/external chest compressions, such as rib fractures.

Can I be sued if the casualty accuses me of molest during my resuscitation attempt?

So long as the Good Samaritan renders aid in accordance with proper medical techniques, it would be extremely difficult for a casualty to credibly claim that the Good Samaritan's actual intent was to molest/commit outrage of modesty.

Will I get into trouble if I walk away without rendering help?

The law does not impose a legal duty on bystanders to assist someone in danger, unless the bystander was the one who put the casualty in danger. This is true even if you are a healthcare professional.

However, the standards of medical ethics require a trained medical professional to go to the aid of someone who can potentially be saved by the skills and training which the medical professional possesses.

CONCLUSION

Remember, at the point of cardiac arrest, the casualty's heart is no longer pumping blood around the body and the person is technically dead. Your help to attempt resuscitation can double a casualty's chance of survival.

**YOU CAN HELP
TO SAVE A LIFE!**