



Letters to the Editor

Praising "Demystifying Defibrillators"

Dear Dr. Perryman,

Today I came across your article on "Demystifying Defibrillators" and felt that I must write to congratulate you on writing such a succinct piece on this topic. Although it is necessarily of limited length, it is sufficiently detailed to provide the reader with all the important developments leading ultimately to successful in-hospital defibrillations (beyond the anecdotal) in the early 1960s, and the practical use of the machines outside of the hospital in the second half of the decade.

I am the "Geddes" of "Pantridge and Geddes" who equipped an ambulance with a portable defibrillation system in January, 1966. We had first demonstrated the efficacy of a highly mobile system operating within the hospital, and with this success and armed with new information regarding the appalling mortality very early in the coronary attack, together with the hitherto undocumented lengthy delays before patients could reach a hospital coronary care unit, Pantridge (the physician in charge) suggested early in 1965 that we should "go out and pick them (the patients) up."

Although the data were compelling, there were at that time many technical and organizational obstacles to be overcome. Fortunately, Pantridge's persuasive personality fairly easily overcame the administrative resistance and acquired financial support from the British Heart Foundation for the first year of operation, while I as the junior member of the team concentrated on finding a solution to the problem of charging a defibrillator from DC batteries and on training as many physicians as possible in CPR.

You may already be aware that Pantridge in conjunction with staff of the Cardiology Laboratory developed the first ultra-portable defibrillator weighing only 7 lbs., which was manufactured by Cardiac Recorders and was widely used in the 1970s.

Sadly, my dear friend Frank Pantridge died in December 2004. I have recently retired and live with my wife near Tampa in Florida, having spent the last 19 years working as an "Arrhythmia Cardiologist" (including implantable defibrillators) in Canada. I am skeptical that a pharmacological means of preventing ventricular fibrillation on a large scale will be found, and I believe that for the foreseeable future we must be satisfied with further reducing the "coronary epidemic," rescuing those who collapse in accessible places, and monitoring patients at times of temporary risk with implantation of defibrillators in those at permanent significant risk. Certainly, defibrillators should be placed in museums, but they will need to remain outside of the glass case for a long time to come!

Once again, congratulations on your historical article which should help to keep younger generations of physicians from taking the modern AED defibrillator for granted.

- John S. Geddes, MD

