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HEALTH



pulse
By Andy Wang

MATTERS OF THE HEART

In 1990, Hank Gathers, 23 years old and a rising star on the Loyola Marymount basketball team, collapsed during a game and died. Gathers had discovered only months earlier that he had an abnormal heartbeat, a condition that led to his sudden cardiac arrest.

The incident was no isolated tragedy. According to Los Angeles lawyers Stephen Solomon, Ralph Saltsman and Stephen Jamieson, the condition is the leading cause of death for adults 35 to 40 years old. The three partners have

done considerable research on the subject since encountering a similar case involving the sudden death of a high school athlete, and are now campaigning for the availability of automatic external defibrillators (AEDs) in all public schools and buildings.

According to the American Red Cross, more than 200,000 Americans die every year of sudden cardiac arrest, and up to 50,000 of them can be prevented with immediate CPR and defibrillation. Without what's called the "cardiac chain of survival," death is almost certain.

With AEDs starting at about \$900 and requiring only basic training, the only barrier left to their ubiquitous deployment is ignorance, said the lawyers. The legal team is asking concerned parents and citizens to push school districts to invest in AED purchases and training. For a purchase that could literally be life and death, "There's no reason why every public place and every school doesn't have (an AED)," Solomon said.

For more information on sudden cardiac arrest and AEDs, visit www.redcross.org.