On a Mission: Heart Center's Yee Makes CPR Training Accessible for Underserved Communities

UA Sarver Heart Center
August 2019

So many conversations with Erika Yee begin with, "I have some great news!"

Yee brings a spirit of dedication and professionalism to her role as health education assistant at the UA Sarver Heart Center — whether she's teaching chest-compression-only CPR in underserved communities, developing accessible educational materials for Spanish speakers or the deaf community, or conducting clinical research on health care disparities with a faculty member.

Yee's first encounter with the Sarver Heart Center happened when she was a Girl Scout and attended Camp Fury in Tucson. The camp, organized by Southern Arizona fire departments, includes a course on chest-compression-only CPR taught by Sarver Heart Center staff.

A couple of months later while sharing a meal with friends before high school band practice, Yee became aware that a bandmate had collapsed in sudden cardiac arrest. She responded with the training she learned at Camp Fury, saving her friend's life.

"This was a life-changing experience for me," Yee said. The experience opened Yee's mind to considering health care as a profession.

Yee focused her Girl Scout Gold Award project — the top award for Girl Scouts who make a lasting change related to an issue they're passionate about — on teaching chest-compression-only CPR to more young people, collaborating with the Sarver Heart Center and the Steven M. Gootter Foundation to produce a video directed at teens. While attending the UA as a physiology major, Yee became a certified emergency medical technician and continued to volunteer at the Sarver Heart Center teaching chest-compression-only CPR.

She started working part time as a health education assistant while an undergraduate and remained on staff after beginning in the Master of Public Health program at the UA in May. A natural leader, Yee has recruited and trained about 15 volunteers, mostly UA undergraduate students, who are committed to teaching chest-compression-only CPR throughout Southern Arizona.

This group often coordinates with the UA College of Medicine ? Tucson Resuscitation Education and CPR Training Group, known as the REACT Group, and the Sarver Heart Center Women's Heart Health Education Committee. It also held hands-on training sessions during the College of Medicine ? Tucson's "Doc Talks" lecture series last year.

'Great News' and a Growing Need

One of Yee's "great news" announcements: Her efforts resulted in about 4,500 people...
learning chest-compression-only CPR between July 2018 and July 2019, well ahead of her targeted goal of 3,000 people.

"We've been able to train people in Tucson and in underserved areas of Arizona," she said, including Bisbee, Douglas, Nogales, the Tohono O'odham Nation and others.

"I am incredibly proud of the work that our team has been able to complete," she said, adding that she hopes even more will be trained thanks to a state statute that went into effect July 1. The statute requires high schools to provide CPR training before students graduate. "Many schools have been turning to the UA Sarver Heart Center for free trainings."

How does Sarver Heart Center provide free trainings? By relying on collaborations with other agencies that provide resources and donations from people who support the outreach mission.

To reach the deaf community, Yee collaborated with the Disability Resource Center and Arizona State School for the Deaf and the Blind to produce a chest-compression-only CPR training video in American Sign Language [4]. Working with REACT Group leaders who received funding from Arizona Area Health Education Centers program, she helped develop Spanish-language resources and recruited volunteers who could provide trainings in Spanish [5].

Expanding Horizons

Yee also assists Dr. Khadijah Breathett [6], an assistant professor of medicine and an advanced heart failure cardiologist who conducts clinical research focused on health disparities in minority populations.

"Erika has been an integral part of my investigational study of health care decision-making," Breathett said. "She is an expert in performing cognitive interviews, managing electronic surveys, and problem-solving. She demonstrates excellence in all of her pursuits."

Also on Yee's plate: applying to medical school to pursue her dreams of becoming a doctor.

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