

CPR saves teenager's life

First aid could be the single most important thing you ever learn

A relaxing fun-filled weekend at the Skogheim Christian Centre, which hosts a number of church and Christian ministry events for all ages, almost ended tragically for teenager Phakhamani Mathe. But, thanks to the efforts of a number of quick thinking teenagers and the centre's Bronwyn Carter, his life was saved.

"Mathe's near drowning was a textbook case in why you should do a first aid course that teaches you how to do cardiopulmonary resuscitation [CPR] - it could be the single most important thing you ever learn," says Vikki Pretorius, who together with her colleague, Yolanda Williams, were the first paramedics to arrive on the scene.

Mathe's near drowning occurred while teenagers from all around the country were participating in sport at the camp. Sane Sigudu (20) says that during the activities he noticed Mathe bobbing up and down in the camp's pool. "I thought he was playing a practical joke until I saw he was sinking," says Sigudu, who is trained in first aid. "I immediately dived into the pool and together with the help of Sifiso Manzini [17], managed to pull Mathe from the bottom of the pool.

Mathe was unconscious, with lots of water coming out of his nose and mouth," recalls Sigudu. "We then started CPR on him while another teenager called for help," he adds. Sandile Hlongwa who is also first aid trained arrived on the scene and assisted with CPR. "Mathe then started coming round and coughing up lots of water. All of this took place in what seemed like only a matter of seconds".

Carter who has done several first aid courses said she never thought she would need the skills she learned: "This event changed my view and reinforced how important it is that all members of the public be trained in first aid. When I arrived by the patient's side he was semi-conscious, I then placed him in the recovery position and wrapped him in blankets as he was going into shock. I remained with Mathe, at all times, until the Netcare 911 paramedics arrived."

"Thanks to the life-saving techniques applied to the patient shortly before we arrived, Mathe had come around completely when we got to the scene," says Pretorius. "We assessed and treated him for hyperthermia, which leads to an elevated body temperature, and covered him with blankets before taking him to Netcare Margate Hospital where he was kept in the intensive care unit for observation."

Sigudu says the experience reminded him that you only live one life, therefore make sure that if you want to swim you know how to and do so under supervision, so that assistance is at hand should something go wrong.

Netcare 911 chief operating officer, Craig Grindell, recommends all parents, childminders and others, such as teachers who are involved with children daily, complete a Basic Life Support course which offers CPR, with a reputable training provider. For example, Netcare Education offers a course through its School of Emergency and Critical Care. The school can be reached on 010 209 8383 or via firstaid_enquiries@netcare.co.za. You can also obtain more information on its website <http://secc.netcare911.co.za>. The Netcare Assist app for smartphones is also invaluable in an emergency as it literally provides assistance with a single swipe of your finger as well as a step-by-step guide on exactly what to do in case of a near drowning.

Grindell suggests the following in case of a near drowning:

- Ensure the safety of the rescuer and remove the patient from the water.
- Lay the patient on a firm flat surface and check for responsiveness and breathing.
- Call an emergency medical services provider, such as Netcare 911 (082 911), which will dispatch qualified emergency medical personnel to assist you. Start emergency medical care immediately while you are waiting for emergency medical personnel to arrive. The call centre agent can offer valuable telephonic guidance until the emergency medical team arrives.
- If the patient is not responding and not breathing, start chest compressions (30 compressions), then open the airway and

give two breaths (breaths administered must result in chest rise for air entry to be considered adequate).

- After five cycles of 30 compressions to two breaths, check for signs of life by the 'look, listen, feel' technique - look for movement, listen for air passing through mouth or nose and feel for a pulse.
- If the patient has swallowed vast amounts of water and vomits once revived, turn the victim on his or her side immediately
- If the victim has a pulse but is not breathing, continue rescue breaths. Give one breath every three seconds for children between one and eight years of age and one breath every five seconds to those over the age of eight. If both pulse and breathing have returned to normal, turn the victim on to the side.
- Continue administering CPR until an advanced life support paramedic or doctor can take over treatment.

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