



HOUSTON FIRE DEPARTMENT

Medical Notes



FROM THE DESK OF DR. PERSSE

February 1, 2016

Women and Heart Disease



For more than a decade, the American Heart Association's **Go Red** campaign has helped build awareness that heart disease is the number 1 killer of women – killing more women than all forms of cancer combined. February 5, 2015 is **National Go Red for Women Day**. <http://www.goredforwomen.org/>.

In honor of the 13th anniversary of Go Red, I want to remind our all HFD members, civilian and classified, that women suffering a heart attack are more likely to have atypical symptoms. Atypical symptoms of heart disease are complaints other than “classic chest pain.” As many of our EMTs and paramedics already know, some important symptoms of a heart attack beside chest pain include:

- Facial pain/jaw pain – burning sensation on cheeks
- Left arm pain
- Unusual upper body discomfort
- Indigestion
- Back pain
- Unusual or unexplained fatigue
- Nausea, dizziness, lightheadedness, feeling faint
- Breaking out in a cold sweat

Some female patients have described a burning sensation on their cheeks, right before collapsing in front of our HFD crews. Other women described “not feeling well all day” but suddenly lost pulses. There are also many others whose first symptom is “sudden death” just as it is for many male cardiac patients. Many survivors are ladies who appear to be the picture of health and were shocked to awaken in the hospital, recovering from a cardiac arrest!

Today, we reunited HFD members with a cardiac arrest survivor who initially described feeling weak and her husband called 9-1-1. When HFD responded she was awake but minutes later lost pulses in front of paramedics. HFD members worked feverishly and did a great job resuscitating her. She lost pulses several times before arriving at the hospital. She and her husband came to thank HFD for saving her life!

It is estimated that 42 million U.S. women are affected by heart disease and **90%** of women have one or more risk factors for developing heart disease. I know our HFD members take good care of our cardiac patients, both women and men. I just want to remind you of the unique symptoms for women and I challenge everyone to go home and talk to the important women in your life about heart disease and tell everyone to learn CPR! Check out the Texas Two-step FREE CPR class this Saturday, Feb. 6 throughout the state and many in the Houston area: http://www.texacep.org/page/1601_2Step_locs#houston

-Dr. Persse