

## National first aid and resuscitation councils to merge

**Fabian Koh**

Two national agencies that aim to equip citizens with first aid skills will merge to avoid duplicating efforts.

The National Resuscitation Council (NRC) and National First Aid Council will form the National Resuscitation and First Aid Council from April 1, NRC chairman Venkataraman Anantharaman said yesterday.

He was speaking at the seventh National Life Saving Day event held at the Sports Hub OCBC Square.

Professor Anantharaman said the merger follows a proposal to the Ministry of Health (MOH) to combine the two organisations “some years ago” to “cut duplication of efforts”.

“First aid is a core skill which every citizen should be able to deliver to someone in need,” he said, adding that the eventual aim is to have one trained first aider in every household.

He said that last year, about 180,000 people were trained and certified in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), up from about 32,000 in 2008.

The theme for this year’s National Life Saving Day, which aims to raise awareness about cardiac arrest and injuries and teach people CPR and basic first aid skills, was “Sports safety, saving lives”.

Prof Anantharaman explained that sport was chosen as the focus because while the number of cases of CPR done by bystanders has risen from 20 per cent in the early part of the century to just over 50 per cent today, “this has not been followed with a similar increase in first aid for injuries”.

The rate of bystander first aid is 15 per cent.

Mr Ong Ye Kung, Minister for Education (Higher Education and Skills) and Second Minister for Defence, commended the efforts to “foster a culture of sports safety” at yesterday’s event.

Mr Ong said that as a sportsman in his youth, he would continue playing or training even while injured. “Today when I look at our younger kids going into sports, they are so well taken care of. They know just the right things, like physiotherapy, to make sure most injuries don’t become long-term chronic problems,” he said.

At the National Life Saving Day event, 600 people were trained in CPR over two sessions.

Lift engineer Kwang Wei Qiang, 28, who attended the morning session with his neighbour, said: “This is an important life skill. It is also not very difficult to learn, because they (the trainers) break it down into easy steps.”

Yesterday’s event also recognised Dr Peck Thian Guan, 55, who received the Survivor Award after performing CPR on 65-year-old retiree Song Sah Lay when he collapsed with a cardiac arrest during a game of badminton last year.

Dr Peck, the National University of Singapore’s director of the Office of Safety, Health and Environment, had learnt CPR 10 years earlier. He said: “It is very overwhelming when there’s a life before you that can be lost if you don’t do your part.”

Mr Song, who has since quit smoking, said: “He (Dr Peck) is a gift sent down from heaven to save me. I am very thankful.”

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At the National Life Saving Day event yesterday, 600 people were trained in CPR. PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO