

by “stop the bleed” measures. This concept was not recognized until a few years ago. If we compare Korean war or Vietnam war, with Iraq war or Afghanistan war, the statistics show 67% reduction in blood loss deaths in latter wars, due to first aid measures to control of bleeding. A person can bleed out and die in 10 minutes from a major arterial injury. It would be too late by the time paramedics arrive on the scene or the person is taken to an operating room in a hospital.

What are the steps involved in “Stop the bleed” (STB)?

First and foremost is to ask for help. Call 911 from your cell phone or ask someone else at the scene to do so. Tell them what you see and give them your exact location. Earlier the professional help arrives, the better. As soon as a paramedic or ambulance arrives, you can hand over further care to the professionals.

Next is to make sure that you are safe yourself to provide the help. In other words, make sure you and the victim are not in the way of further danger at the scene. If the victim is the middle of a highway, do not initiate your first aid right there, as the oncoming traffic can be lethal. Move the victim to the sidewalk or to the shoulder. Other such dangers are flooded areas, or where there are explosives or poisonous gases, or continued gun fires.

Third step is to identify the source of bleeding. Where is the blood seeping from, how fast is the bleeding, is it spurting like a fountain or is it a slow bleed, which body part is involved in the bleeding injury. At times you may have to remove clothing on the victim to find the actual bleeding spot. Please wear gloves if you have them available. Is the bleeding area on the head and neck or torso or in the groin or axilla? Is there a mangled or crushed extremity, is

there a missing body part?

Fourth step to try and stop or at least reduce the bleeding. Use whatever method that is available on the spot. Use the heel of both hands to stop it. Use clothing materials, piece of shirt, towel, feminine napkin pads or gauze pads to push inside the wound and apply tight bandage around it. Continue to apply direct pressure over the bleeding spot. Use a tourniquet, if possible, by applying it about 2-3 inches above the site of bleeding.

Next is about use of tourniquets. They are of great value if the bleeding is from the extremities. In the past, it used to be thought that tourniquets can result in amputation of the



extremity and were ineffective in control of bleeding. It is no longer true. It is better to lose a limb than lose the whole life. The tourniquet must be very tight, tight enough to stop the bleeding. Professional tourniquets are available, which can be progressively tightened and clamped. Any other material such as a belt or rope or clothing can be used. Effective tourniquets will cause pain. Mark the time when the tourniquet was applied for health care workers to follow. Best location to place a tourniquet is 2 to 3 inches above the site of bleeding. However, avoid placing the tourniquet across knee or elbow joints. At times a second tourniquet may be needed to stop the bleeding, to be applied just above or below the first tourniquet.

If there is an impaled object such as a knife, rod, spear or arrow inside the tissues, do not remove them at the scene. Let the surgeons remove them in the operating room. It is possible that the impaled object itself is tamponading the bleeding from great vessels. Removal of such impaled object will result in rapid exsanguination and death.

Once professional medical help arrives, explain what you saw, and what you did. Inform them that you had touched the victim’s blood in your first aid efforts. Explain the same to the law enforcement officers. Afterwards, with their permission, and as soon as possible, wash your body and hands profusely with soap and water and change into fresh clothing.

After the Sandy Hook school shootings, efforts are being made to bring in public awareness in “Stop the Bleed” (STB) as a life saving measure that everyone should know. First aid kits containing gloves, gauze pads, gauze rolls, bandages and tourniquets are recommended to be kept in cars, schools, public places and homes. Training on the “Stop the Bleed” measures are encouraged in schools, colleges and other public education forums. Every life saved is a boon and blessing to the society. “The only thing more tragic than a death is a death that could have been prevented.”

For further information, please visit the web site on “Stop the Bleed” program by American College of Surgeons, Committee on Trauma.

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