



## The answering machine that could save lives

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Medical Reporter

MORE than two-thirds of Australians would not call an ambulance if they thought they were having a heart attack.

The findings, from research commissioned by the National Heart Foundation Australia, also reveal that many Australians do not know all the warning signs of a heart attack.

Now Sydney researchers have created a mobile device that can take an ECG, call an ambulance and a cardiologist.

The Newspan, in which 1655 people were questioned nationwide, found that only 8 per cent of people recognised upper body pain as an indicator of heart problems, while 39 per cent recognised pain in the arm or side as a possible heart attack.

The chief executive of the Heart Foundation NSW, Tony Thirlwell, said the results were surprising. "I don't think we believed that many people would ignore [the warning signs] and take such a gamble on their health and their lives."

Mr Thirlwell said people experienced pain to different degrees and in different areas of the body before and during a heart attack. "It's not just an excruciating pain in the chest but can also be a dull tightening of the chest or even pain in the neck, jaw, shoulder and back."

The poll, commissioned to coincide with national Heart Week, found that more than a third of Australians would not call triple-0 for fear of wasting the ambulance officers' time if it was a false alarm.

It found that 18 per cent of people would call a friend or family member rather than an ambulance.

Peter Leijdekkers, a senior lecturer at the University of Technology, Sydney, first became interested in early intervention when his boss died of a cardiac arrest, without calling triple-0.

Mr Leijdekkers and his team from the faculty of IT have created a mobile device that analyses electrocardiograms by connecting a pre-existing wireless heart monitor to third generation mobile phone

technology.

The device can send the electrocardiogram in real time to heart specialists and if a person experiences chest pain and is unable to call an ambulance the phone also leaves an automated voice message and text message with their cardiologist and any other emergency numbers programmed into it.

The device, which is undergoing clinical trials, has the approval of the Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods. It should be available in the next year or so.

Geoffrey Tofler, professor of preventive cardiology at Royal North Shore Hospital, said more than half the deaths from heart attack in Australia occurred outside hospital.

Early intervention strategies included some ambulances being equipped to send on electrocardiogram data so cardiologists could be better prepared.

This had been shown to reduce the death rate to 3 per cent or lower, he said.



Phone link ... Peter Leijdekkers and Valerie Gay, UTS. Photo: Peter Morris