



Disaster Life Support: The 21st Century’s CPR

By Maurice Ramirez, D.O.

When CPR was invented in the 1970s, the goal was to train as many potential bystanders as possible to help if someone had a heart attack or choked in public. In an effort to educate everyone about the importance of learning basic chest compression and the Heimlich maneuver, even Hollywood got in on the act, incorporating the practices into movie and TV storylines. As a result of great marketing, these days, virtually everyone knows what CPR is, and hundreds of thousands of people are trained to do it.

In the new millennium, a heightened awareness of both terrorism and the impact of natural disasters has created a need for a “new CPR,” core skills that will help both laypeople and medical professionals meet the challenges of man-made and natural disasters.

Why is this important? Consider this:

- The 1994 Oak Ridge, California, earthquake wiped out eight hospitals and affected twenty million people.
- Last year, Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma decimated much of three major Gulf Coast cities.
- In 2004 Hurricanes Charlie, Frances, Ivan, and Jeanne laid waste to Florida.
- And no one will ever forget the World Trade Center bombings on September 11, 2001.

Today, you need DLS more than CPR: Ironically, many people believe they need CPR training more than they need training in Disaster Life Support (DLS), owing to thirty years of great public relations efforts on behalf of CPR. The fact is, you are far more likely to be called upon at some point in your life to utilize Disaster Life Support skills than you are likely to be a bystander when someone experiences sudden heart death, for which CPR was designed.

The key idea here is *heightened awareness*; like heart attacks, disasters have always happened, but we're more aware of disasters than ever before and are therefore called upon to respond as never before. The number of people in the last decade who have been directly affected by natural disaster exceeds the number of people who have experienced sudden heart death in the last *two* decades. In other words, the likelihood that you, your family, or your neighbors are going to need Disaster Life Support skills is actually *twice* as great as the chance that you will ever need to use your CPR skills!

DLS training available for everyone: If Disaster Life Support is the new CPR, then the National Disaster Life Support Foundation (NDLS) parallels the American Heart Association. Established by the American Medical Association, this group of universities and government agencies saw an evolving risk two years before 9-11 and a need for the lay-public, health care providers, and advanced health care providers to have basic skill sets in the event of a disaster.

Training in Disaster Life Support is offered as a public service, usually through universities, although it is not yet consistently marketed well, so you may not know about it in a timely fashion. Though universities and the federal government feel the critical need to train health care providers and first responders, they also offer training to anyone who wants to come to a Core Disaster Life Support course.

To train citizens to first protect themselves and then deal as first responders and medical responders to natural and man-made disaster, the NDLS designed three courses:

1. Core Disaster Life Support (CDLS) is the equivalent of CPR; it is “for the people.” Designed for the layperson, this course teaches participants how to prepare for a natural or man-made disaster, how to know a disaster is coming, and how to survive the first 72 hours after the crisis, when you are likely to be awaiting rescue and are responsible for own and your family’s well-being.
2. Basic Disaster Life Support (BDLS) teaches rescue personnel and some health care providers specifics about treating injuries and other immediate medical consequences of disasters as well as many of the basic skills of the CDLS course, so they, too, can keep themselves and their families safe and avoid distraction as they set about helping others.
3. Advanced Disaster Life Support (ADLS) lasts two days and involves participants in live disaster drills in conjunction with local fire, rescue, and police departments. Tailored to the community’s needs, the programs may provide

terrorism, hurricane, or tornado drills to train high-level, advanced providers who are called upon every time there's a disaster. The scene is set as if the disaster has already happened, with actors and mannequins as victims. Participants earn certification as qualified to run a disaster scene.

Specialized training in the “new CPR” for businesses: Some large businesses have been doing CPR training in-house for years, so Business Disaster Life Support programs have been designed to offer a specialized core Disaster Life Support course for employees and managers as well as some specialized planning and contingency issues for the business itself, such as providing a model for securing the facility in the event of an evacuation. BizDLS, as the program is known, helps organizations answer important questions such as “When should we stay open and when should we get out of town?” With this training, organizations can better integrate into their communities during the disaster and during the immediate recovery period. Far-sighted businesses have responded well.

Four hour investment = Life-changing empowerment: Disaster Life Support training at all levels must become the standard in the U.S. and internationally, just as CPR did in the 1970s and 1980s. The public must be trained to care for themselves as much as possible, and every doctor, nurse, paramedic, respiratory therapist, and even veterinarian must learn basic Disaster Life Support. That way, they can first protect themselves and their families so they then feel safe, secure, and competent to aid the public in the event of a disaster. The ultimate goal is to avoid the chaos of unpreparedness that followed Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and increase the number of people who are rescued successfully and receive care.

DLS courses are not scary; they are four-hour classes that are fun and empowering, as you learn to take control in disaster situations. In fact, every course for the last three years has sold out, around the country and the world. The training gives you a chance, as CPR courses did, to walk out and say, “I not only know how to take care of myself, but I also know how to save lives.” But there's a difference: With CPR you can only save one person. With CDLS, you can learn to save your family, your neighborhood, your business, or even your entire community.

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Dr. Ramirez teaches business people across the nation to make virtually instantaneous decisions using the same thought processes taught to physicians in the Emergency Room.

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