February 3, 2011

Reclassifying Defibrillators

To the Editor:

Re "Stricter Oversight Urged for Defibrillators" (Business Day, Jan. 26):

The Food and Drug Administration's recommendation to reclassify automated external defibrillators as high-risk devices is shortsighted and could cost thousands of lives each year.

While there were 22,000 malfunction reports over the last five years, most resulted from routine device self-checks, not the actual use of A.E.D.'s. Further, considering that more than one million A.E.D.'s have been deployed in the United States, that's an extremely low failure rate.

A.E.D.'s do not cause death — they are used to bring dead people back to life. While they cannot save everyone, they give many victims a second chance, particularly when used quickly by bystanders.

If regulatory hurdles increase, public access to A.E.D.'s will decrease. That would be devastating news for the 295,000 people who suffer sudden death outside hospitals each year — and a giant step backward in the quest to improve survival from the nation's leading killer.

Mary Newman
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Wexford, Pa., Jan. 27, 2011