Paddling Safety Info From Hanley Loller

Compressions-Only CPR and Water Don't Mix

I've been meaning to re-write this old post and update the stats for some time now, then a shocking conversation I had with a member at the meeting convinced me that it couldn't' wait. So, the stats are old (I wrote the original in 2009) but the facts are the same. Some corrections have been made after Dr. Wes Prince chimed in (thanks Wes). Please take the time to read this, it's very short, and could save someone's life.

What you as a boater should know about the difference between traditional breaths-and-compressions CPR taught bythe American Red Cross (ARC) and compressions-only CPR taught by the American Heart Association (AHA). It is vitally important for you, as a boater, to know and understand the difference.

Cardiac arrest is the leading cause of death in the US, whereas accidental drowning doesn't even break the top 50. In 2007, the last year for which complete statistics are currently compiled there were:
--over 616,000 deaths from cardiac arrest and 3,443 accidental drownings

That's 179 cardiac arrest deaths for every 1 drowning. For the AHA, this is a no-brainer, since compressions-only CPR has several advantages over breaths and compressions in cases of cardiac arrest .

1) It's easy. A 911 operator can train you to do it on the spot over the phone
2) It takes away the squeamish factor. No mouth to mouth contact with a clinically dead stranger.
3) Cardiac arrest victims usually have a gallon of fully oxygenated blood in their system so just circulating it can maintain them for a few minutes.
4) The vast majority of cardiac arrest happens in a setting where Emergency Medical Services (EMS) is close at hand.

EMS is not close at hand, CPR of any type has an absolutely dismal chance of success against cardiac arrest. This is because CPR does not address the mechanism of injury (usually arrhythmia) and so if EMS can't get to the victim quickly, their chances are extremely slim.

Compressions-only CPR has one huge drawback: In the event of drowning or suffocation, compressions-only CPR just adds insult to injury. Performing compressions-only CPR on a drowning victim wastes precious time that could be used to save their life.

Drowning is an entirely different ballgame. In drowning, or suffocation, the mechanism of injury is LACK OF OXY-GEN. That is why the heart has stopped and oxygen must be reintroduced into their system immediately if there is going to be any chance to save them. In this case, you as the rescuer can address the problem directly by introducing fresh air into the victim's lungs. You can reverse the mechanism of injury and literally save the person's life, even if EMS isn't coming. CPR when applied to a drowning victim swiftly, actually has a REASONABLY HIGH rate of suc-cess.

So, to sum up:

Cardiac arrest: In this case, the main purpose of CPR is to maintain the person in the hope that advanced life support will arrive swiftly and if it does not, there is little that you can do to help them.Keep doing CPR and hope help arrives.

Drowning (or suffocation): In this case, you as the rescuer can literally snatch a person from the jaws of death if you can re-introduce oxygen into their system quickly and circulate it. In these circumstances it is absolutely vital that the CPR you perform is traditional breaths-and-compressions CPR and that it starts as soon as possible.

For a better picture of the importance of breaths and compressions CPR, go to the American Whitewater accident database and browse through it. There are numerous cases of persons whose lives have been saved because one of their rescuers knew CPR and applied it quickly.

https://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/Accident/view/

Don't be caught out on the river without the one best tools you can have to save someone's life!