

WRITTEN QUESTION E-6861/08

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to the Commission

Subject: On-board-ship cardiac defibrillators

Sudden cardiac arrest is one of the most common causes of death. In 85% of cases, death occurs from ventricular fibrillation, making this one of the most frequent causes, followed by asystole (10%) and electromechanical disassociation of the cardiac muscle (5%). In all cases, the physical and functional arrest of the heart results in the instant collapse and loss of consciousness of the patient. If immediate action is not taken to re-establish normal heart rhythm, death inevitably ensues within five minutes. The only effective means of stopping ventricular fibrillation is to re-establish normal sinus rhythm via an electrical charge (defibrillation). The chances of survival of a patient who has suffered cardiac arrest depend on the timely use of a defibrillator: there is a 90% success rate if it is used within one minute of collapse, with this decreasing by 20% every minute thereafter, while the probability of success is nil as from five minutes into cardiac arrest. The high patient mortality rate is very often due to the distance from medical aid systems or to incidental factors which prevent immediate action being taken, as in cases that arise in yachting, with the particular difficulty of providing medical assistance at sea. In Italy, Decree No 279 of the Ministry of Health of 25.5.1988, and Decree No 232 of the Ministry of Transport and Navigation of 21.1.1994 do not stipulate that the first aid case, which is a mandatory requirement when sailing, should be equipped with a semi-automatic portable defibrillator, which is essential in the event of such an emergency.

Can the Commission state:

- whether it is considering initiatives addressing this issue;
- what measures it will take in this regard, particularly in respect of the yachting sector, in order to safeguard citizens' health?