

I saw an amazing story on television news the other day of an Australian man who successfully gave CPR at the supermarket checkout to a 2 year old girl who had stopped breathing. When asked if he had received formal first aid training he said he hadn't but in that very moment he remembered in the dark recesses of his mind a lesson he'd had at school, applying what he could remember with the help of the emergency services operator.

This week, Parliament discussed survival rates from cardiac arrests and the need to improve emergency live saving skills (ELS). It is an issue that made the national headlines after the footballer Francis Muamba collapsed mid-game at White Hart Lane, and then more locally when an off duty paramedic performed CPR when a man collapsed at Aylesford Bulls Rugby Club.

There are around 60,000 out-of-hospital arrests in the UK each year with survival across the UK very poor and highly variable. Although half of the cardiac arrests that occur are witnessed by passersby too few people have knowledge of CPR to make the difference between life and death.

Countries such as France, Denmark and Norway have added ELS to their curriculum and have seen survival from shockable cardiac arrest increase as high as 52%, compared to 2-12% in the UK. In the US 36 States have passed legislation and in Seattle CPR has been taught for over 30 years in PE lessons with much improved survival.

In the past I've been reluctant to put life saving skills on the already packed curriculum, preferring it instead to be a decision taken by headteachers, but evidence does show teaching youngsters ELS could make a difference later on in life. Who knows what is around the corner or likely to crop up at the supermarket checkout but being equipped with the right training could really determine a life or death outcome.