Three recognized for lifesaving efforts at Open House

When Marjorie Johnson, a supply control clerk with Brown & Root Service Pioneer, participated in CPR training this summer, she anticipated that some day the course would be valuable but she didn't expect to use it the very next month to save someone's life.

Many of us recall the afternoon of August 26. JSC was overflowing with visitors, volunteers and staff taking part in the center's Open House event. Shelia Popillion and Greg Warfield, both employees of Tolman, were driving to an assignment when they noticed a commotion near Bldg. 47. A woman had collapsed and her grandson was trying to rouse her. The two turned their vehicle around and went to the site to see how they could assist.

"We could not get her to respond," said Warfield. "She was pale, not sweating at all and her eyes were like glass. I thought she had a heat stroke and ran to get wet towels for her head. In the meantime, Shelia went to flag down a security officer."

Johnson was at a nearby booth when a coworker directed her attention to the emergency.

"There was a woman laying face down in the grass, and at that point I had a co-worker call for emergency assistance on his radio," explained Johnson. "We turned the woman over so I could check if she was breathing. It was so noisy, I couldn't hear anything but I could tell she was not breathing."

Johnson then began performing CPR on the victim. Within just a few breaths the patient began breathing on her own but still lapsed in and out of consciousness until the paramedics arrived.

"I spent a lot of time talking to her, trying to get her to keep her eyes open," said Johnson. "Her breathing was very shallow and we couldn't get a response from her. It was a very frightening experience and I can tell you I was very relieved when the paramedics arrived."

The patient was taken to a nearby hospital and released under doctor's care later that week but the memory remains with Johnson, Warfield and Popillion.

"I am very appreciative of the opportunity to be able to assist in situations like this," said Johnson, who had just completed a CPR course in July through BRSP. "So many times, people don't want to take chances to risk helping others and they make excuses but that doesn't help solve the problems." ■

NASA JSC Photo 2000e26818 by Robert Markowitz

Shown here, center holding plaques, are Marjorie Johnson, Greg Warfield and Shelia Popillion who stepped in to save a life during JSC's Open House. The three were recognized by Center Director George Abbey and SR&QA's Director John Casper during a special ceremony at Safety & Total Health Day for their actions. Left to right, SafetyMan, Abbey, Johnson, Warfield, Popillion, Nathan Wright, acting director, Center Operations Directorate, Richard Castleberry, general project manager for BRSP, and Casper.

What should you do?

When you find someone in distress, the steps should be:

1. Call 911. If you are on site at JSC or Sonny Carter Training Facility call x33333, Ellington Field, x44444.
2. If the victim is conscious try to make them comfortable until help arrives.
3. If the victim is unconscious, check for breathing and a pulse.
4. If the person is not breathing or no pulse is found, initiate CPR.
5. Continue CPR until medical help arrives.
6. Stay at the scene to provide information to medical personnel.

Through its "Got the Squeeze, Call the x33333's" Heart Disease Awareness and CPR Training Initiative, JSC Occupational Health and Test Support offers several CPR and related heart disease awareness courses.

For more information call the JSC Occupational Health Clinic at x34111.

JSC scientist receives Presidential Early Career Award

Dr. Janice Yelle, NASA scientist and head of the JSC Cardiovascular Laboratory, has received a 2000 Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers. The award was presented on October 24 in Washington, D.C., at the Executive Office Building adjacent to the White House.

"I was delighted to hear that I had been selected for this award," said Yelle. "Everyone in the lab was delighted. This is a tremendous honor."

Upon being informed of her selection, Yelle immediately sent an e-mail to her colleagues informing them that the award was for all of them. "This lab is fantastic. We function as a team. We all received the award."

NASA Headquarters nominated Yelle for the award for research in the area of cardiovascular adaptation to space flight. Yelle says that she will use the two-year monetary award to buy equipment and hire personnel for the lab. A portion of the funds may also be used to extend current grants that are due to expire next year.

Of particular interest to researchers in the JSC Cardiovascular Laboratory is the study of orthostatic hypotension – the inability to maintain adequate blood pressure while standing – a problem that affects many astronauts upon return to Earth. The award money will help scientists further study this problem.

"We've spent a lot of years studying this issue, and we've made some progress trying to determine the mechanisms of this problem and what we can do to fix it," says Yelle.

NASA Administrator Daniel Goldin, Dr. Janice Yelle, and NASA Chief Scientist Kathie Olsen

Most researchers and scientists are interested in hypertension (abnormally high blood pressure) because it adversely affects the heart. But according to Yelle, hypotension (abnormally low blood pressure) is a problem as well albeit in a smaller population of people. Its effects can be very debilitating.

Yelle shares information with researchers at the University of California at San Diego, Mayo Clinic and Vanderbilt University who are working with patients suffering from hypotension. "Everybody is so intellectually interested in space flight because it is so unique. You have these perfectly healthy people who return from space and they look like these patients. And three days later they are fine again, but the patients never return to health. If we can figure out how these healthy people deteriorate and then spontaneously recover, we might be able to help the patient population." Conversely, she can ask the researchers what they are doing to help their patients and then apply some of those treatments to the lab's work with the astronauts.

Head of the JSC Cardiovascular Laboratory for the past eight years, Yelle earned her doctorate in pharmacology from the University of Texas Medical Branch last May. She became eligible for the award upon receiving her doctorate.

She says that she always wanted to earn a doctorate. "I needed the additional education. I knew that I was lacking in some areas. My thinking is more sophisticated than it was when I earned my master's degree back in 1982 at Virginia Commonwealth University.

"I give JSC the credit for enabling me to earn my doctorate. JSC arranged the schedule so that there was no way that I could fail. All I had to do was pass." And pass she did, graduating with a 4.0 grade point average. Now she is working with UTMB to help establish a doctoral program in space physiology.

Yelle hopes to build the JSC Cardiovascular Laboratory into something even better than it is. "It is already fantastic, but I would like to attract more senior people here to come and visit."

The award is just a stepping-stone on the way to greater achievements, Yelle says. "I don't consider this award the highest thing I'll ever achieve. I consider it just the beginning."

Recipients were chosen from nominations submitted by agencies of the federal government through which each has current funding. The Office of Science and Technology selected this year's 59 recipients, including six from NASA. The recipients represented all of the federal funding agencies eligible to submit nominations.

Yelle was the only NASA recipient cited for her work in the life sciences, the others cited for their work in the physical sciences. ■