

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS – THE ADVANCED CARDIAC CARE (ACC) PROGRAM

What is the Advanced Cardiac Care Program?

This program is:

- A new comprehensive effort to ensure all patients with advanced cardiac disease, specifically heart failure, and their families receive needed care, support, and information so that symptoms can be managed at home, improving quality of life.
- A public education/outreach campaign about advanced heart disease, the important role of hospice to support and manage the disease at home for patients and families, and the benefits of cardiac care long before patients need hospice.
- Designed to address health disparities over access to cardiac care and palliative/advanced illness and hospice care among traditionally underserved minority communities.
- A plan to improve clinical quality with defined standards of care and other resources and reduce overall costs by decreasing emergency room visits and acute hospital stays and readmissions.



Who is involved?

Capital Caring Health (CCH) and members of the National Partnership for Healthcare and Hospice Innovations (NHPI), a group of nonprofit hospice members across the country. Approximately 30 hospices will participate. The American Heart Association also validated clinical information and served as a source for patient and family support material.


Why is the program needed?

Prevalence:

More Americans die each year from heart disease than any other condition, including cancer—it is responsible for one out of every four deaths in the U.S. The number of those with heart disease continues to rise due to increases in obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and growing numbers of older adults.

Better quality of life at end of life:

Currently only 50% of end-stage cardiac patients receive the benefit of hospice even though it improves quality of life for both patients and their families as symptoms are managed in the comfort of home. Cardiac patients are substantially more likely than



those with other diseases—such as cancer—to die in the hospital or nursing facility than at home. *This program can prevent hundreds of thousands of people from dying alone each year in hospitals – something that is a social and preventable tragedy.*

Health disparities:

Although heart disease affects Americans across different races, African Americans and other ethnic groups may be diagnosed at a later stage, often from poor or delayed access to care—leading to more advanced and complicated conditions and much worse outcomes.

Minority communities are also far less likely to use hospice: nationally, 8.2% are African American; 6.7% are Hispanic and 1.8% are Asian, compared to whites at 84%—in part due to lack of awareness about hospice care options in the community.

Improved health system resource use and cost:

Providing end-stage cardiac care in the home is not only preferred by most patients and families but is far more cost effective for patients and the overall health system. Improving clinical quality includes reducing unnecessary hospital emergency visits and hospital stays/readmissions, improving overall costs.

Providing care at home is also a better use of resources—especially as COVID-19 has overwhelmed hospitals, affecting capacity, and causing many cardiac patients to delay care. A return to “regular” operations for hospitals is likely to take time.

How does the program help patients, families, and caregivers?

Hospice and palliative care can safely manage patient symptoms at home and prevent a situation from becoming worse, requiring a trip to the hospital.

Many patients living with end stage heart disease make frequent visits to the doctor’s office, emergency room and often have multiple hospital stays due to breathing difficulties, fatigue, and other worsening symptoms. All are stressful and often expensive—without the right care, such patterns can last for months...or years.

What care and support are provided?

Capital Caring Health offers palliative/advanced illness and hospice care as well as primary care in the home—for those who are not terminal. Patients with end-stage heart disease remain safely at home under the care of an interdisciplinary care team, working with a patient’s doctor.

Care includes:

- Regular visits and check-in calls by a nurse with specialized training.
- Patient education customized for each patient and family.
- Medications to help control symptoms, which are reviewed with patients.
- Additional supportive care at by request—from a social worker, nurse assistant, chaplain, counselor, and/or a volunteer

CCH and other experts developed *The Patient and Caregiver Handbook*—a practical guide to help manage difficult symptoms at home.



The guide includes:

- Symptom management and self-care tips.
- Information on medications and diet.
- Tools including a chart to monitor symptoms and log to track blood pressure and weight.
- An action plan with guidance based on how a patient feels—for example, when to call a member of the care team or action one can take at home

What should medical professionals know about the program?

Capital Caring Health worked with the nation’s leading experts in cardiac care, palliative care, and advanced illness to develop guidelines, clinical protocols, and resources to address major gaps in care for patients with end stage heart disease. The result is a program guide with consensus recommendations by NPHI experts, validated by experts from the American Heart Association.

From workflow to algorithms, resources are designed to improve awareness of clinical best practices for care improvement and cost efficiencies while promoting shared decision making with patients across care teams and settings.

The number of patients with end stage heart disease is expected to increase given the success of available treatment. Successfully managing clinically complex cardiac care requires timely referrals to palliative and hospice care. Capital Caring Health—with four decades of experience—and other participating hospices are ready to manage such care, likely in concert with the cardiac centers that initiated treatment.

Where can I learn more?

Please see our [website](#) or call toll-free (800)-869-2136 for information about Capital Caring Health and the Advanced Cardiac Care Program.

Copies of the *Patient and Caregiver Handbook* may be downloaded [here](#) or you may request a print copy [here](#).