

Advanced Stage Heart Disease

When Hospice Can Help

Today, many of the 5.7 million Americans with advanced heart disease are living longer and better lives. However, even some of the best medical therapies eventually fail—and more invasive interventions are often contraindicated or rejected by the patient and family as too severe.

Healthcare providers are then confronted with a difficult dilemma—how best to manage patients with end-stage heart disease in the face of limited, if any, options. Hospice is often the answer.

Hospice for Heart Disease: The Facts

More than 1 million congestive heart failure (CHF) patients are admitted to inpatient settings each year, often for breathing difficulties or fatigue. Yet many of those admissions could have been prevented through palliative and hospice care.

With its focus on symptom and pain management, supportive and spiritual care, hospice can improve the quality of life of patients suffering from end-stage CHF. Care is typically provided in the patient's own home, which also contributes to a sense of well-being and comfort.

Intriguingly, for patients with CHF, hospice may actually extend life. According to one study, CHF patients who chose hospice had a mean survival of 402 days versus 321 for those who did not.¹

Studies also show that the majority of caregivers and families would have welcomed information about hospice at the time they learned of their loved one's terminal diagnosis.²

We're Here to Help

At Capital Caring Health, we want the transition from life-saving to life-enhancing late-stage care to be as seamless as possible...for both you and your patient. For more information, or to arrange a consultation, please call 800-869-2136 or visit www.capitalcaring.org.

About Us

Capital Caring Health is the largest non-profit provider of elder health, advanced illness, hospice and at-home care services for the Maryland, Virginia and Washington, D.C. area. We provide quality care where people live, supporting dignified, independent aging. For more information, visit capitalcaring.org or call our 24-Hour Care Line at 1-800-869-2136 to learn more.

¹ *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management*, Vol. 33, No. 3, March 2007, page 243

² The Role of the Family Physician in the Referral and Management of Hospice Patients; *Am Fam Physician*. 2008 Mar 15;77(6):807-812.

Hospice Referral Guidelines

For patients with CHF and other advanced coronary disease (chronic ischemic heart disease, left-sided heart failure, previous myocardial infarction), physicians should consider hospice in the presence of any of the following clinical indications:

- Identification of specific structural/functional impairments
- Ejection fraction <20% (not required, but an important consideration)
- A poor response to diuretics and vasodilators
- Dyspnea or tightness in the chest
- Impaired heart rhythms, contraction force of ventricular muscles and impaired blood supply to the heart
- Changes in appetite, unintentional weight loss
- Impaired sleep functions
- Decline in general physical endurance
- Relevant activity limitations and or impaired mobility
- NYHA Class IV functional status

Only a physician is able to determine whether a CHF patient meets the qualifications to be admitted to hospice. However, the above signs and symptoms in patients with CHF or other end-stage cardiac conditions strongly suggest that the current approach to care is no longer working.

To arrange a consultation, please call our 24-Hour Care Line at 800-869-2136.

