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Tagline

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Heart and Stroke Patients and Their Families Can Benefit from Palliative and Hospice Care

The American Heart Association and American Stroke Association are following a new policy, which stresses the importance of palliative and hospice care for patients with advanced heart disease and those who have had a stroke. The associations recommend an early start to palliative care and a referral to hospice when patients can benefit from end-of-life care.

About 5.7 million Americans over the age of 20 are affected by heart failure. Approximately 6.6 million Americans over 20 have had a stroke. Palliative care can help heart and stroke patients in a significant number of ways.

Palliative care is meant to improve patients' quality of life. It is defined as a "patient- and family-centered care," which helps families by "anticipating, preventing, and treating suffering," state the authors of the new policy statement.

"This approach to care can help patients better understand the disease they are fighting, their treatment options, and their prognosis," the authors explain.



Heart failure and stroke patients often have deteriorating health, troublesome symptoms, and a complicated care regimen. Palliative care can help these patients by prioritizing patient preferences, helping to manage symptoms, and helping to prepare patients and families for end-of-life care. The earlier palliative services are integrated into the care plan, the more the patient can benefit. It is suggested that patients talk with their doctors or caregivers early on about their preferences and goals of care.

A timely referral to hospice is also important for heart and stroke patients. The goal of hospice care is to support a peaceful death for the patient while providing support for the family.

"Despite the availability of hospice care, most patients dying of advanced cardiovascular disease die in hospitals," write the authors. Hospice can help patients and families by providing in-home visits, necessary medication and equipment, 24-hour emergency hotlines, in-patient hospice care, and support and relief for the family caregivers. In addition, heart failure patients enrolled in hospice have been found to live longer than patients not enrolled in hospice.

The associations write that they hope more heart disease and stroke patients and their families can benefit from palliative care and hospice services in the future.

How Palliative/Hospice Care Helps:

- Better understanding of the disease, treatment, and prognosis
- Improved treatment of symptoms and relief from suffering
- More patient and family involvement in decision making, based on patient values, preferences, and goals
- Better doctor/patient communication
- Better preparation for end-of-life and associated care
- Grief support for family members

— American Heart Association/American Stroke Association Policy Statement 2016

Hospice Information for Patients and Families

Hospice Helps Patients Remain in their Own Home with Family

To help Americans better understand how hospice care can help patients and families, the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO) has published “Facts about Hospice Care You Might Not Know” on its website at www.momentsoflife.org.

According to the NHPCO, research has shown that 8 out of 10 Americans would prefer to remain at home with family and loved ones if they were to have a life-limiting illness. Hospice can help this happen. In fact, the majority of hospice patients receive care at home.

The main goal of hospice is treating the person instead of the disease. Hospice focuses on providing care that fits the patient’s needs and wishes. The goal is also to offer support to the family caregivers, and not just the patient. Pain and symptom management, medical care, and emotional and spiritual support are all part of hospice’s team-oriented care. Hospice strives to improve the quality, and not just the length, of life.

The NHPCO says that the usage of hospices is growing. Currently, more than 1.6 to 1.7 million people in the U.S. each year receive hospice care to help with a life-limiting illness.

One surprising fact is that only 36.6 percent of hospice patients are dealing with cancer. Many people think hospice only serves cancer patients, but that is far from the truth. In reality, hospice helps terminally ill patients with many different diagnoses. Aside from cancer, the most common conditions of hospice patients are heart disease, debility, dementia or Alzheimer’s, lung disease, and stroke.

The costs of hospice care are covered under Medicare, Medicaid, most private insurance plans, HMOs, and other managed care organizations.

Please call us if you would like more information about how hospice can help.

Fewer Dementia Patients Are Being Given Feeding Tubes

Many doctors no longer recommend the use of a feeding tube for patients with advanced dementia.

Although many advanced dementia patients develop difficulty with eating, a research study published by the *Journal of the American Medical Association* has found that in the past 14 years, the use of a feeding tube among dementia patients has decreased by about 50%.

Fewer feeding tubes are being used for these patients because of research showing that a feeding tube is not better or healthier for dementia patients than careful hand feeding.

The American Geriatrics Society recommends oral assisted feeding instead of tube feeding, pointing out that dementia patients who are hand fed do at least as well as tube-fed patients. Hand-fed dementia patients live at least as long

as tube-fed patients, and they are not more likely to develop pneumonia. In addition, hand-fed patients are more comfortable. “Food is the preferred nutrient,” the organization emphasizes.

The use of feeding tubes for patients with advanced dementia was listed as one of “Ten Things Clinicians and Patients Should Question” in 2013. Experts note that advanced dementia patients who have a feeding tube can become agitated and are more likely to develop worsening pressure ulcers. These patients are also more likely to be given physical restraints or medication to counteract the agitation they are experiencing.

The authors of the study urge doctors and families of advanced dementia patients not to use feeding tubes. They say that doctors and families can benefit from following a “palliative approach to feeding problems in patients with advanced dementia,” which places the focus on patient comfort and quality of life.

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Hospice Name

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City, State, ZIP

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