

Integration of Palliative Care Services in Heart Failure Patients

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The specific aim of our study is to establish a reproducible protocol for implementation of early palliative care intervention in congestive heart failure patients, with the ultimate goal of reducing readmission rates, and also improving pain and symptom management, decreasing caregiver burden and establishing advanced care planning for end-of-life care. Palliative care in heart failure is often administered late in disease course and there is no standardized protocol. Our goal is to randomize patients with recent hospitalization for heart failure to receive either current palliative care or a standardized protocol over the course of one year to evaluate efficacy of palliative care in improving quality of life and symptom burden. This standardized course includes four visits with goals of educating patients, establishing treatment goals, involving a LCSW, re-evaluating symptom burden and needs, and finally establishing end-of-life goals. We use the KCCQ and PHQ as our primary metric, as well as analysis of hospitalization and re-admission rates. This procedure remains in progress. Response thus far has been very positive, with patients eager to benefit from palliative care interventions. We have developed a close working relationship with our cardiologists and our heart failure nurses and educators, which provides benefit to our patients.