

Heart Failure is Taking over the World

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Does one of your loved ones have heart failure? Have you ever wondered what its like to be in their shoes? Well, today you'll learn quite a bit of information to understand the daily life of living with heart failure. Heart failure is a prevalent, but preventable, complex disease that effects the supply of blood to vital organs and if not treated may lead to many complications such as anemia, or most severe, death. Heart failure is a long-term disorder that affects the ability for the heart to adequately pump blood to the body. Because of this, the blood that can't be pumped by the heart starts to build up in other parts of the body causing edema in areas of the body such as the legs, lungs, and feet. Heart failure can be split into left and right sided heart failure. Left sided is classified when the heart can't pump the blood properly to the body and organs, either caused by an inability to fill or empty adequately. Right sided is when the blood cannot be pumped to the lungs properly. Left sided usually causes right sided heart failure (Cleveland Clinic, 2023).

Body:

There is an abundance of risk factors that associate with heart failure including modifiable and non-modifiable risks. Non-modifiable risk factors would be factors like age and ethnicity or any genetic disorders. Modifiable risk factors are factors that can be helped or reduced like hypertension, tobacco use, alcohol use, and simple lifestyle changes like diet and exercise. In order to prevent heart failure, it is important to keep an active lifestyle along with a healthy diet. It is recommended to exercise at least 30 minutes per day, although it doesn't have to be anything serious or strenuous. It could be as simple as a walk or jog. Hypertension is one of the most primary risk factors of heart failure which can be prevented by simply controlling the hypertension or in other words, high blood pressure. If high blood pressure is not controlled, it

puts a constant strain on the heart and will then lead to heart failure because of the chronic hypertension that is not being controlled correctly. When discussing left sided heart failure, it is good to know how it may present. Most commonly, the individual may have shortness of breath, crackles and wheezes in the lungs, and troubling breathing with activity. It is the most common type of heart failure and is the result of a left ventricle disability. Right sided may present with different symptoms like weight gain, dependent edema in legs, feet, or abdomen, and stomach upset. Right sided tends to have more systemic effects that cause problems around the whole body because it is much more complex. But overall heart failure is not a good thing. It will affect the heart, but after a long period of time, there will start to be systemic effects, which is usually when right sided heart failure begins. The kidneys will start to take a toll while trying to compensate for the heart's decreased output. The brain will then start to release hormones due to the lack of blood flow it receives and eventually the heart will begin to atrophy and swell with inflammation. "Approximately 6.7 million Americans over 20 years of age have HF, and the prevalence is expected to rise to 8.5 million Americans by 2030" (Bozkurt et al., 2023). There is a very high population that lives with heart failure in America, and it is always rising. It is crucial for an individual to understand the importance of this disease in order for the number of new heart failure diagnosis to start decreasing. "The lifetime risk of HF has increased to 24%; approximately 1 in 4 persons will develop HF in their lifetime" (*Heart Failure Society of America (HFSA) Scientific Statement: Update on Device Based Therapies in Heart Failure*, 2024). By leaving this disorder untreated, hospitalizations will increase tremendously leaving the nurse-to-patient ratio highly out numbered. Many healthcare facilities now are short-staffed right now, so imagine how much more trouble it would be if everyone stopped treating their heart failure diagnosis and had to be hospitalized. Leaving heart failure untreated can lead to many

complications such as pleural effusions which is fluid built up into the pleural space, anemia in the blood, and even death. “In 2022, heart failure was mentioned on 457,212 death certificates (and responsible for 13.9% of all causes of death) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2024).

Risk Reduction/Treatment:

Prevention is a key factor in heart failure. As stated, lifestyles changes are very crucial. Keeping a healthy diet and regular exercise is the best way to keep healthy. Smoking is a factor that is very prevalent in the community that leads to heart failure. Controlling hypertension is also vital in preventing heart failure. It is important to stay in touch with a primary healthcare provider to control hypertension to prevent the exhaustion of the heart muscle. Some individuals have a family history of heart failure and may be concerned about the chances of them developing the disorder. Regular check ups with the primary care provider will be helpful in keeping a close watch on the development of heart failure and if a medical professional does suspect the disorder, there are many ways to diagnose the disorder. Some ways to diagnose are as simple as blood tests like BNP which is a marker for heart failure. Chest x-rays and echocardiograms can also be used to noninvasively check for heart failure. If needed, a doctor may have a biopsy, angiogram or heart catheterization performed to take a deeper look into the disorder. Treatments can include simple drug therapy to reduce symptoms or more complex treatments like surgeries or transplants if needed. There are many stages and classes to heart failure that are created and decided by the medical professionals (Chen MD & Aronowitz MD, MACP, 2020).

Teaching:

Teaching the community about heart failure is a very crucial part of reducing the prevalence of this disorder. If the community doesn't understand the disorder, there is no way to truly prevent and/or treat it. During a community event, it is a good idea to create a simple public presentation that has hands on activities to keep the population engaged. There will be a goal of the public to be able to teach back the information that is presented in order to verify that public understands the presentation. Individuals should be able to have a basic understanding of the different types of heart failure and basic risk factors that can be modified. And lastly, handouts will be given for reference when the individuals are at home.

Conclusion:

The severity of heart failure is very crucial for the community to understand, but also not to scare them. There are many treatments that are rather simple, like a taking a pill daily, however, being able to diagnose this disorder early is key is keeping up with the disorder and not letting the heart get too tired because the heart is not getting enough blood flow to the body and the organs. Many times, heart failure can be related to other cardiac diseases that need to be controlled as well. Many patients with heart failure often end up re-hospitalized which is why it is key to educate these patients on how to keep up with the disorder. Its not just key for the patients but also for the health care professionals to keep up with new research and findings to provide the best evidence-based care for the clients.

References

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