



Featured VITAS Expert

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Advanced Cardiac Disease

GOAL: To educate physicians and healthcare professionals about hospice eligibility and benefits for patients with advanced cardiac disease (ACD) who have a prognosis of ≤ 6 months. Through evidence-based data and a review of case studies, attendees understand the benefits of advance care planning, complex modalities for high-acuity cardiac patients, how to manage symptoms, address pain and provide comfort and dignity near the end of life.

Key Takeaways:

1. Heart disease is the number one cause of death in the US but ranks second to cancer for admission to hospice. Advanced cardiac disease in its various forms leads to physical, psychosocial and financial burdens for patients, their families/caregivers and the healthcare profession.
2. Common symptom burdens experienced by ACD patients include pain, drowsiness, dry mouth, shortness of breath and depression.
3. Complex modalities, including IV inotropes, pacemakers and ventricular assist devices, can help manage symptoms for hospice patients who require high-acuity care.
4. Hospice care for patients with ACD identifies and honors care goals, manages symptoms including pain, relieves burdens on patients and caregivers, avoids unnecessary suffering, strengthens relationships with loved ones and honors most patients' preferences to die in comfort at home.
5. Key indicators of hospice eligibility and the need to start conversations about goals of care include a Palliative Performance Score of 50 or lower, decreasing function, increasing symptoms and distress, frequent/increasing use of healthcare (especially hospitalization and emergency department visits), and the presence of underlying comorbidities.

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