

Integrating Palliative Care and Heart Failure: the PalliatHeartSynthesis realist synthesis

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Plain language summary

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Plain language summary

People with heart failure can frequently become unwell with poor quality of life despite advanced medical therapies. Palliative care can do much to alleviate suffering for people with heart failure as it focuses on adding to patient care by treating the whole person – their physical, psychosocial and spiritual needs, which improves quality of life for both the patient and their loved ones. However, poor integration of palliative care into the management of heart failure is an ongoing problem. To understand why this is, we have undertaken a particular method of literature review called realist synthesis that looks at all types of literature to identify what works, for whom and in what circumstances. We have worked closely with our stakeholder group (including healthcare providers and patients who have heart failure and their carers) to advise and give us feedback throughout this review.

We found the following:

- A review of education for health and social care professionals is needed to make sure that palliative care for patients with non-cancer conditions such as heart failure is adequately covered.
- Education is also needed for patients and those who care for them to help them understand what palliative care is (holistic care delivered alongside active heart failure management based on patient need) and what it is not (only for cancer patients and end-of-life care).
- All health and social care staff should work closely together when managing patients with heart failure to learn from each other.
- Policy, practice and service user champions must be identified and supported to share the benefits of integrated care.
- Visible guidelines should prioritise integrated palliative care and heart failure so they become part of everyday practice.

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