

Avoiding the Heartache: Navigating Occupational Therapy's Role in an End Stage Heart Failure Program

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Heart failure is one of the leading diseases impacting adults worldwide. Heart failure is a condition where "the heart is weakened and unable to produce a significant cardiac output to meet the body's needs" (Hammon and Hasson, 1996). Globally, deaths from heart failure were estimated at 7.6 million in 2005, with over 80% of those deaths occurring in lower and middle income countries (<http://www.who.int/medicentre/factsheets/fs317/en/index.html>). Both heart transplantation and use of Left Ventricular Assist Device (LVAD) provide options for these patients to improve their functional performance and enhance their quality of life. Literature, professional presentations, and published research surrounding heart failure is minimally reflective of occupational therapy interventions.

The authors aim to have participants: 1) identify challenges affecting individuals with end stage heart failure, 2) define intervention challenges that occupational therapy practitioners face when treating individuals with end stage heart failure, and 3) understand occupational therapy treatment protocols for a hospital based end stage heart failure program using the Occupational Therapy Practice Framework.

Patients receiving a heart transplant or LVAD are impacted physically and psychologically in multiple areas of occupation, both before and after their surgical procedure. Physical limitations include pain, decreased endurance, activity restrictions and nausea. Psychological challenges include anxiety, depression, grief and stress. As the end stage heart failure patient experiences obstacles in the course of their treatment and recovery, so too, does the occupational therapist in providing treatment. These obstacles include environmental limitations, medical acuity, and variability with length of stay.

Research has indicated that post-surgical patients' perception of functional status, especially with self-care, is decreased as compared to before surgery (Grady et al, 2004). Occupational therapists provide interventions to achieve independence with ADL and functional mobility utilizing adaptive techniques, energy conservation strategies, and therapeutic exercise programs. When working within the client-centered aspects of the Occupational Therapy Practice Framework, the end stage heart failure patients' quality of life is positively impacted.

In a 1.5 hour workshop, presenters intend to use lecture, interactive case studies, and open discussion to address objectives. Up to 100 participants can benefit from the teaching methods for this topic.