A Practical Guide to Heart Failure in Older People

Editors

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14.1 What is Palliative Care? 242
Numerous books have been written about heart failure, and both international and local treatment guidelines are readily available. But the information they contain about heart failure in older people is limited: It has to be identified piecemeal - from brief accounts in book chapters, which are usually limited in scope or, for more detailed information on specific topics, from articles in journals.

The lack of trial evidence advocating the use of standard “heart failure medicines” in older people (and their consequent sub optimal treatment) is well known, but this doesn’t apply to most other age-related topics. These include epidemiological predictions that the prevalence of heart failure in older patients (currently 10% in the over 80s) is set to increase dramatically in the next few decades with major implications for healthcare provision; the complex interaction of common comorbidities with heart failure in older patients which hampers diagnosis and adversely affects disease progression and treatment; and research into the normal aging of the cardiovascular system, much of it during the past 10 years or so, which has a dramatic effect on the prevalence, aetiology, gender differences and prognosis of heart failure. And whereas summarising the treatment of heart failure (i.e. the appropriate pharmacological, non pharmacological and interventional options) is relatively straightforward, the same cannot be said of patient management (i.e. how best to provided treatment and care): it is more complicated and time consuming in those who are older as they are often frail and socially isolated. As a result they are more dependent on medical and nursing support and on input from social services.

Based on these observations, a good case can be made for regarding heart failure in older and younger patients, certainly in a number of respects, as different diseases.

Our aim has been to present heart failure in much the same format as it is in other books on the subject but here the subject matter is focused on how the disease impacts on older patients and their personal carers, and on the health care teams (in primary care and secondary care teams and specialist heart failure nurses) whose responsibility it is to identify and treat, and to collaborate in caring for them.
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