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Role of family physicians in education and self-management support for patients with chronic heart failure

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Background & Aim: Chronic heart failure (CHF) is a disease that requires self-management by the patient and so it is understood that when they are diagnosed they need access to relevant information about their disease. The purpose of this paper was to ascertain the sources and content of education for patients with CHF and evaluate the use of patient education for self-management support of patients with CHF in primary care.

Method: The study was a cross-sectional survey carried out from September 2014 to March 2015, of patients categorized as having type CHF. 371 persons responded to the questionnaire and we estimated the effectiveness of patient education. A questionnaire was developed asking a series of questions including basic demographic data, a series of questions regarding the education received, who provided it and self-perceived knowledge.

Results: Whilst 91% of patients reported receiving education at the time of diagnosis, it is a concern that 9% say they were not given information. Only a few patients said they had received education from hospital consultants. The coding of the interviews yielded three major topics including loss, fear, and desire for improved care. These major topics were composed of seven sub-topics including four ones associated with loss, two with fear, and one with desire for improved care. After the training, the percentage of patients who kept a diary of introspection increased by almost three times, the percentage of patients measuring blood pressure and heart rate increased by four times, measuring the body mass increased by six times.

Conclusions: CHF education was mainly delivered in primary care by family physicians. While there have been a growing number of efficacious pharmacological and non-pharmacological interventions for patients with CHF, their effectiveness will be limited without self-management support to assist patients in adopting behaviors that contribute to improved health.