

# February:

## American Heart Month

*Supporting individuals with Heart Disease: When Palliative Care Helps & When Hospice is Appropriate*

### **Palliative Care for Heart Disease**

#### **When It's Appropriate:**

- Worsening shortness of breath, fatigue, or swelling
- Difficulty managing cardiac medications
- Increasing ER visits or hospitalizations
- Anxiety, fear, or confusion about their illness
- Challenges maintaining daily activities

#### **How Palliative Care Helps:**

Palliative care improves comfort and stability while continuing disease-directed treatment, with a strong emphasis on education:

- Symptom management (breathing difficulty, edema, fatigue, pain, anxiety)
- Medication optimization and monitoring
- Education for individuals and families on:
  - Managing cardiac symptoms at home
  - Diet, fluid/sodium balance, and medication routines
  - Recognizing changes in condition
  - Understanding disease trajectory and planning ahead
- Advance care planning (goals of care, future decision-making)
- Support to reduce avoidable hospitalizations

### **Hospice Care for Heart Disease**

#### **When It's Appropriate:**

Hospice is recommended when an individual has advanced heart disease with a life expectancy of six months or less, demonstrated by:

- NYHA Class IV symptoms (shortness of breath at rest)
- Recurrent hospitalizations for heart failure
- Progressive, unmanageable symptoms despite treatment
- Declining functional ability and increasing care needs

#### **How Hospice Supports Individuals:**

Hospice focuses on comfort, dignity, and stabilizing symptoms through comprehensive support:

- At-home medical management for shortness of breath, edema, chest discomfort, and fatigue
- 24/7 on-call nurse availability to prevent unnecessary emergency transfers
- Oxygen therapy & breathing treatments
- Diuretic management & rapid-symptom response kits
- Support for anxiety, restlessness, and sleep disturbances
- Emotional and spiritual support for individuals and families
- Medical equipment such as oxygen, hospital beds, and cardiac-related medications

## Hospice Goals for Heart Disease

- ✓ Avoid repeated hospitalizations
- ✓ Stabilize symptoms quickly
- ✓ Provide comfort-oriented care
- ✓ Support individuals in their home setting safely and comfortably

## Palliative vs. Hospice: Quick Comparison

Focus	Palliative Care	Hospice Care
Timing	Any stage of heart disease	Final months of life
Treatment	Continues disease-directed treatment	Comfort-focused only
Primary Goal	Symptom relief + education + stabilization	Comfort, dignity, and crisis prevention
Support Level	Regular symptom management and planning	24/7 support, equipment, intensive comfort care
Setting	Home or facility	Home or facility

*Partner With Us*

We help identify individuals who may benefit from palliative or hospice support. We also provide:

- Cardiac-specific education
- Collaborative support for complex cases
- On-site or virtual training for staff or family caregivers

