PROJECT INFORMATION

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Does a Decision Aid Help Patients Learn about Their Treatment Options for Advanced Heart Failure?

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What was the research about?

Patients living with advanced heart failure have three treatment options: a heart transplant, medicine, or a left ventricular assist device, or LVAD. An LVAD is a device that doctors surgically place in the heart to help pump blood. Transplants can save lives but not all people qualify for them and hearts are not always available. Medicine can improve symptoms but may not stop heart failure. LVAD treatment can help patients live longer and improve symptoms, but it has risks such as stroke and infection. Patients facing this decision may not have all the information they need to choose a treatment.

The research team created a decision aid to help patients learn if LVAD treatment is right for them. Decision aids help people decide on treatment based on what is most important to them. The team wanted to see if the decision aid helped patients learn about LVAD treatment.

What were the results?

One week after deciding on a treatment, patients who used the decision aid knew more about LVAD treatment than patients who didn't use the decision aid. But after one month, there was no difference in how much both groups knew.

Patients who used the decision aid said they felt more informed about their treatment decision than patients who didn't use the decision aid. Of patients who chose LVAD treatment, those who used the decision aid were

more satisfied with their lives than patients who didn't use the decision aid.

There were no differences between these groups in the number of patients who chose to get LVAD treatment or said that life with an LVAD was closer to what they expected.

Who was in the study?

The study included 98 patients ages 30–80 with advanced heart failure. Of these patients, 77 percent were male and 23 percent were female. The patients received care from clinics in Houston, Cleveland, Oklahoma City, and New Orleans. All of the clinics specialized in LVAD treatment.

What did the research team do?

The research team assigned patients by chance to one of two groups. In both groups, patients learned about LVAD treatment from standard education materials from the clinics. Patients in one group also received a paper copy of the decision aid and viewed the decision aid on a website. The research team developed the decision aid with input from people with advanced heart failure, caregivers of people with advanced heart failure, and doctors.

The team asked patients to fill out three surveys. Patients filled out one survey before receiving the standard education materials or the decision aid. This first survey asked patients how much they knew about LVAD treatment and how satisfied they were with life before they made a treatment decision.

The research team then asked patients to fill out the second survey. Patients who chose not to have LVAD treatment filled out this survey one week after the first meeting. Patients who chose to have LVAD treatment filled out this survey one day before surgery, or about a week later. This survey asked how much patients knew about LVAD treatment and how informed they felt making a decision about LVAD treatment.

One month after the first survey, patients filled out a third survey. This survey asked patients how much they knew about LVAD treatment and how satisfied they were with life. For patients who received LVAD treatment, the survey asked if life with an LVAD was what they expected.

What were the limits of the study?

Patients completed surveys within one month after viewing the website or standard educational materials. The research team doesn't know if patients who viewed the website and chose LVAD treatment will continue to feel more satisfied with their lives.

Future research could test if the effects of the decision aid last longer than one month.

How can people use the results?

Clinics that serve patients with advanced heart failure may consider using this decision aid to help patients choose a treatment.

To learn more about this project, visit pcori.org/BlumenthalBarby098.