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Success with Heart Failure: Help and Hope for Those with Congestive Heart Failure. 3rd edition.

by Marc Silver, MD

Review by Vincent J Felitti, MD

Transmitting useful medical information to patients is acknowledged as important for gaining their cooperation with treatment. Information transfer is also acknowledged as difficult: Typically, the material to be conveyed is foreign to the patient-recipient, whose situation is frightening; and most physicians are less skilled at information transfer than are advertising copywriters, whose stock-in-trade is using words to elicit intended responses and behaviors to an information-filled message.

Dr Marc Silver has written a book that is helpful for improving this situation for clinicians and patients discussing a diagnosis of congestive heart failure. The book is written in informal language that will be readily understood by any patients who want to improve their condition and are not emotionally blocked from doing so (eg, by depression or denial). *Success with Heart Failure* starts with a well-written anatomy lesson that describes systolic and diastolic heart failure more simply and clearly than any source I have seen, and this description is followed by an interesting discussion of how heart failure develops. Woven into these descriptions is a preventive thread that helps translate information into action; but the simplicity of the writing style does not prevent Dr Silver from helpfully discussing sophisticated details like the role of b-naturetic peptide levels or the clinical significance of the ejection fraction and how it is measured.

A chapter titled “How Attitude and Emotion Affect Heart Failure” includes an excellent section on sexual

dysfunction in congestive heart failure and how this dysfunction can fuel hopelessness and depression. A subsequent chapter explains how various foods and drugs affect absorption or excretion of cardiac medications. The functions, interactions, and side effects of these medications are well thought out and are described clearly and usefully. The section on treatment concludes with a chapter on heart transplantation and various mechanical assistive devices. Perhaps best of all is the chapter “Food and Heart Failure”: I have never before seen such a well-written, interesting discussion of the physiologic role of sodium in cardiac health and how to translate this information into healthful behaviors—shopping right, cooking right, eating right, and recording body weight every day.

In conclusion, *Success with Heart Failure* gives voice to an excellent concept: that patients must understand their health status and how to participate meaningfully in treatment. The book is clearly, practically, and interestingly written; positive and encouraging, it recommends related books and reliable Web sites. Physicians who recommend the book to patients and their families are likely to improve control of congestive heart failure and generate more satisfaction among patients and their families. Although the book could use more careful editing, *Success with Heart Failure* does an important job well and currently has little competition. Recommending the book to patients with congestive heart failure would be a sensible choice for clinicians. ♦

Vincent J Felitti, MD, has been with the Southern California Permanente Medical Group since its opening in San Diego in the late 1960s.

Easy Reading

Easy reading is damned hard writing.

— Nathaniel Hawthorne, 1804-64, American novelist and short-story writer