

June 14, 2012

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

Part of our responsibility as healthcare providers is to educate our neighbors on wellness and disease prevention. Recently, several of our NCH nurses have taken that advice to heart—literally!

Our innovative colleagues at the North Naples Campus Baker Tower, 4th Floor Cardiac Telemetry Unit, have established an educational program to help patients with Congestive Heart Failure (CHF), a condition in which the heart can no longer pump enough blood to the rest of the body. It's the most common reason for hospital admissions. Led by Nurse Manager **Kevin Smith**, a group made up of Clinical Educator **Tina Applegate** and Unit **RNs Angela DeVaney, Marie Hageman, Tammy Vander Kooi, Amanda Reyes, Brunette Saintervil, Jessica Whittemore** and **Gregory Wilkerson** are all educating patients and their families about the early signs and symptoms of CHF, how to prevent re-hospitalizations and how to live better and longer.

The team has organized a multidisciplinary class for patients and families, available in English, Spanish and Creole, every Wednesday at 1:30 p.m. on the 4th Floor Conference Room of the Baker Tower. The crowds have nearly been standing room only, all eager to learn more about the foods they consume, how to read a food label, how much salt is too much (over 500 milligrams per day is more than enough), and whether and when to take prescription medications, including blood pressure pills.

The CHF effort has been joined by many others at NCH Healthcare. One critical variable in this condition is weight gain, an early symptom of a worsening condition, as fluid build-up shows up quickly on the scale. As a proactive measure, our NCH Foundation has generously donated digital scales to every patient who needs one.

Dr. Francisco J. Quiles-Cruz, a hospitalist, is a frequent speaker at CHF seminars, and he has referred patients for additional care—the next innovative link in our CHF clinical education program. **Dr. Herman Spilker** has begun an outpatient CHF clinic, specifically designed to care for patients experiencing exacerbation of their disease manifested by fluid retention, weight gain, shortness of breath, and other symptoms of CHF. We treat these sufferers quickly at the Naples Heart Institute, in most cases the same day, in an effort to keep and treat patients at home and avoid hospitalization. Currently an astounding 30% of CHF patients are readmitted within one month of discharge, and 50% return to the hospital within one year.

Our goal in this multi-level effort is to reduce the number of CHF admissions. Attacking the problem with a team composed of a physician assistant or nurse practitioner along with a dietician, social worker and others has worked effectively in many communities.

Next on the agenda is expansion of the CHF initiative. **Barbara Evans** of the NCH Foundation has spoken with Dr. Spilker to understand how the integrated CHF program, including the CHF outpatient clinic, might be expanded to benefit everyone in southwest Florida. Barbara's next step is to share these thoughts with interested members of our community.

Best of all, the fruits of our CHF educational classes are available to the entire community. (You don't have to be an NCH patient.) Please call 239-552-8336 for more information about this free class.

Respectfully,



Allen S. Weiss, M.D., President and CEO

P.S. Feel free to share *Straight Talk* and ask anyone to email me at allen.weiss@nchmd.org to be added.