

Sanger Heart & Vascular Institute, Heart Success Program

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Since the Sanger Heart & Vascular Institute initiated its Heart Success program at [Carolinas Medical Center](#) in 2011, a key rate for hospital readmissions for heart-failure patients has dropped to 13.9% from 19%. The national average is 25%, a figure the U.S. government wants to see lowered.

“Actually, the readmission rates were not our first concern,” says Dr. [Sanjeev Gulati](#), an advanced heart-failure and transplantation cardiologist who heads the program. “We want to be a leader in taking care of heart-failure patients, giving them a better quality of life and producing better outcomes.”

Heart failure is a leading cause of death in the U.S. There are 6.4 million heart-failure patients in the country, and their ranks are expected to increase 25% by 2030, he adds. The mortality rate after five years is 50%.

The chronic disease weakens the pumping action of the heart. Patients often have diabetes and high-blood pressure. There is no cure.

Heart Success was expanded from Carolinas Medical Center to CMC-NorthEast’s Sanger location in 2012. Last year, a videoconference-based version was introduced in Lincoln County, where the 30-day readmission rate has fallen to less than 10%.

Heart Success uses a holistic, multidisciplinary approach that combines education, treatment and support for patients and their families.

The condition is complex and requires intense management, including medications and lifestyle changes, as well as emergency interventions. Patients need to understand their medications, what activities they can and cannot participate in, who to call when they have questions, and when medical intervention is appropriate.

“It’s all about empowering patients,” Gulati says. “A diagnosis of heart failure can be psychologically damaging and cause depression. These patients are often highly vulnerable and with limited economic resources and a lack of social connectedness. We want to empower our patients, to tell them, ‘You can live with this disease.’ We show them how to manage it and how they can get help.”

After an initial hospitalization for the disease, a Heart Success patient is seen by a heart-failure navigator who guides the individual's care through the program. The effort is staffed by 16 Sanger employees, including three full-time physicians.

In the 30 days after hospitalization, the patient meets with a social worker, pharmacist and nutritionist, and also receives care from physicians in the appropriate subspecialties and nurses. Patients then return to the oversight of their primary-care physician.

"With this approach, patients are able to get the treatment, education and support they can't get in an office setting," Gulati says.

Roughly 900 patients have been through the program at CMC. "There's been good short-term success, and now we are analyzing the long-term effects, like quality of life and mortality," Gulati adds.

Under the virtual program for Lincoln County, patients communicate face-to-face with the Charlotte-based team of caregivers in real time through videoconferencing. Patients can either travel to a local medical office or use their laptop or mobile device at home.

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