

Gentiva cardiopulmonary: getting to the heart of healing



Left to right: Patient Virginia Armstrong gets a lesson in self care from Barbara East, RN.

Sometimes what you don't know can hurt you. Patients often make errors in healthcare judgment simply because they're unaware that they're doing anything wrong. It is possible, however, for patients to improve their quality of life by taking better care of their health, and the first step toward doing so is learning to take an active role in their own care.

This is the basis for Gentiva Cardiopulmonary, the innovative, home-based specialty that's helping patients take better charge of their heart and lung health. "Gentiva is changing the face of home healthcare with this specialty," stated Mary Jo Stack Allen, Clinical Specialist.

Led by a specialty-trained care team, the program combines early detection and protocol-driven intervention with individualized treatment, lifestyle adaptation, in-home patient monitoring, and medication compliance validation. "By combining early intervention with self-care education, we are helping patients better manage their chronic cardiac and pulmonary conditions, achieve lifestyle and behavior changes and reduce emergency department visits and hospitalization," said Kathy Risley, CRNI, Lead Clinical Specialist.

expert clinical care starts with education

Providing skilled care is the foundation of what Gentiva's clinical associates do each day, and education is playing an increasing role in that care. "As a clinician, I see a variety of patients for a multitude of problems, explained Barbara East, RN, Gentiva Cardiopulmonary, Sanford, FL. "And I always view my role as both a teacher and a clinician. With Cardiopulmonary patients, it's important to educate them about their medications, their diet restrictions, how to read food labels, healthy living, and the importance of monitoring their own vital signs for changes. I also teach them about the disease process, risk factors, prevention of complications and treatment options."

The educational approach is paying off in a big way. According to a recent outcomes study of 269 Gentiva Cardiopulmonary patients, 16 weeks after discharge, 99% report they can explain the actions of their medications; 96% say they understand the side effects of their medications; 92% are able to perform activities of daily living and 96% required no further hospitalization for cardiopulmonary-related issues.

a specialty that's changing lives

Gentiva Cardiopulmonary patient, Virginia Armstrong knows what a difference patient education can make. Armstrong started with the specialty under the care of Barbara East only a day after she was discharged from a hospital stay due to a stroke. She also suffered from high blood pressure, but because of urinary incontinence issues Armstrong would not always take the diuretic used to control her condition.

"After a thorough interview with this patient, I determined that Mrs. Armstrong didn't understand the role her medications

played in lowering her blood pressure and in her overall health," explained East. "I felt that if she could see the results of taking the correct medications regularly with an in-home monitoring device, she might be more compliant."

The use of in-home monitoring devices is a growing practice that keeps patients in their own environment rather than in hospitals to observe their condition. The monitor observes patients' vital signs from home, red-flagging health problems before they lead to more serious health issues or costly doctor or hospital visits.

measuring outcomes

The in-home monitoring device allows for daily observance of vital signs without a clinician being present, but that doesn't mean the patient is alone. Deborah Fry, Care Manager, Gentiva's Center for Outcome Measurement, Tampa, FL, is responsible for the 7-day-a-week first level triage in cases such as Armstrong's. "I monitor the patient's vital signs using the in-home monitor and then contact the clinicians and branch with any out-of-range alerts," she explained. "That way we always have an eye on the patient's condition, and they, in turn, have peace of mind."

This device allows clinicians to observe the patient's weight, temperature, blood pressure, heart rate and oxygen saturation. Variances of any one of these can be a trigger for concern and can alert the patient and clinician of potential problems before they become an emergency.

"Monitoring hypertension is critical," East explained. "Since patients don't notice any symptoms of high blood pressure, they tend to ignore it. When we have either the low- or high-tech monitoring in place, patients can actually see what their blood pressure is, the affects their medications have on their blood pressure, and how they feel when their blood pressure is too high or too low."

Monitoring vital signs isn't the only part of Gentiva Cardiopulmonary that is beneficial to patients. The program also offers a lifestyle journal that patients can use to record their daily vital signs, as well as a walking program and a host of educational materials.

getting back to normal

Improving overall health is a team effort. With the help of her husband coupled with Gentiva's educational guidance and expert clinical care, Armstrong has made great strides. "Since my treatment with Gentiva Cardiopulmonary, my blood pressure has been under control," she stated. "I'm no longer casual about my medications and I now understand the importance of taking them like I'm supposed to."

Patient satisfaction speaks volumes. "Homecare with Gentiva has been extremely beneficial to me and my family," Armstrong concluded. "Both my husband and I were shown how to live healthier lives and how to be more aware of our bodies than we were before. By eating better, exercising and taking medications properly, we learned to control our illnesses – at home! I would recommend Gentiva to anyone."

