

'I was terrified of dying alone'

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'I was terrified of dying alone'

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In the five years since his last heart attack Zac Ahmad has been terrified of dying alone.

He was diagnosed with heart failure, damage to the muscle of the heart - a condition linked to one in 10 UK deaths.

Since then, Zac who is also a diabetic, has worried that each unusual palpitation could mean his death.

But a several months ago Zac, 54, from London, was allocated one of the 19 new heart failure nurses provided by the British Heart Foundation (BHF).

Education

He says they helped educated him about his condition and provided a support network of advice.

"Every day I would think 'this is the day I will go'.

"But the BHF heart failure nurses have helped me a lot. I can now telephone them at any time, which gives me piece of mind and helps me access information.

"Before this if I had a palpitation I would start to wonder about whether to call an ambulance or hospital, but now I call one of the nurses.

"One day I was walking in the street and felt I was losing my balance. It felt that I was light headed or like I was drunk and I did not know what

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to do.

"I called one of the nurses and she came straight away and did blood and sugar level tests. She came later the same day and told me that there was a problem with my kidneys and the doctor told me to change my tablets.

"Within just a couple of days of doing this I felt the difference. But before I got this nurse it could have been months before I found out what was wrong and I would worry that it was my heart."

The New Opportunities Fund, which controls lottery cash, has made £10m available to fund more heart failure nurses, like the ones who care for Zac.

Independence

The aim of this network of nurses is help patients retain their independence in their own homes, improve their quality of life and increases information to patients.

BHF nurse specialist Naila Rahman, based at Charing Cross Hospital, said the system had proved very popular with patients as the nurses provided care at home as well as a focal point for patients worried about their condition.

"It is a chronic condition. We do want to educate people because people can die a lonely and isolated death, it is quite awful to have heart failure, but we can help people to cope with their symptoms.

"I don't talk to them all the time about doom and gloom, but we do talk about death and dying.

"This is a disease that is increasing as the elderly population increases."

Heart Failure

Occurs when the muscle of the heart becomes damaged, often after a heart attack

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Around 880,000 people in the UK are affected each year
It is the most common hospital admission for people aged 65 and over
Prognosis is poor and about 40% of patients die within a year
The BHF estimates heart failure costs the NHS £624 million a year

Jackie Lodge, Head of Cardiac Care at the British Heart Foundation said:
"The feedback we've had from patients has been so positive and sometimes, very moving.

"Research shows our nurses have provided a lifeline for many people and the fact we're now able to fund at least 75 more posts means we can make a real difference to the quality of life of thousands of heart failure patients."

Baroness Jill Pitkeathley, chair of the New Opportunities Fund said:
"Prior to this investment, few heart failure patients received care from a specialist nurse - which has been shown to enhance quality of life and encourage patients to understand and manage their own medication.

"It is vital that we do all we can to help people cope with heart failure."

Story from BBC NEWS:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/health/3246879.stm>