

Psychological Impact on New Families

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Today's talk

- Common emotional reactions to a new diagnosis of a life-threatening arrhythmia
- Research
- Ways health care practitioners can facilitate adaptive coping

Emotional reactions to a new diagnosis

- Emotional reactions range significantly
- Emotional reactions can fluctuate over time



Common Challenges

- Anxiety/Depression
- Adjustment issues
 - Understanding condition
 - Lifestyle changes
- Trauma
- Treatment adherence
- Parenting
 - Supporting parents' anxiety
 - finding the new normal
 - Behavioural concerns/Acting out
- Marital difficulties



Research: Psychological Impact of arrhythmia diagnosis

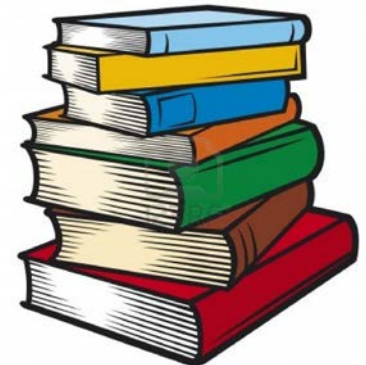
- Adults with life-threatening arrhythmias are at increased risk of experiencing anxiety and depression
 - Poor adjustment to ICD is associated with a significantly increased risk of anxiety and depression

Research: Psychological Impact of arrhythmia diagnosis

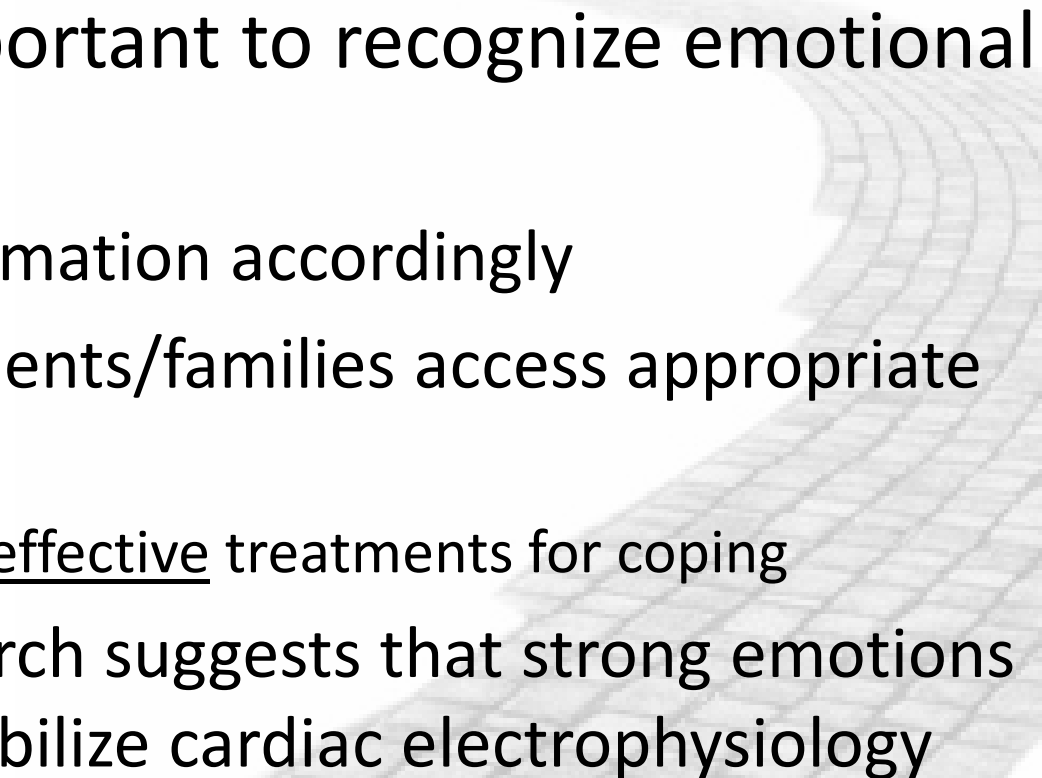
- Children with chronic medical conditions are TWICE as likely to have psychosocial challenges
- Limited research on psychological impact of having an arrhythmia in children
- Children/Teens with life-threatening arrhythmia often experience high levels of anxiety about their condition and prognosis
 - Children with ICDs report frequent worry about receiving shocks
 - Children with ICD reported increased levels of anxiety disorder and lower QOL vs. those with pacemakers

Research: Psychological Impact of arrhythmia diagnosis

- Conclusion:
 - Growing evidence of increased risk for psychological distress in individuals with life threatening arrhythmias
 - Need for more research in this area



The role of Health Care Practitioners: Beyond Medical Support

- Why is it important to recognize emotional reactions?
 - Titrate information accordingly
 - Helping patients/families access appropriate supports
 - There are effective treatments for coping
 - Some research suggests that strong emotions might destabilize cardiac electrophysiology
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How can we help?

Delivering the diagnosis

- Give the patient/family time to prepare themselves
 - e.g., I want you to sit down so we can talk about some really important findings.
- Be clear and concise in your description
- Stop and respond to their reaction



How can we help?

Delivering the diagnosis

- Questions
- Communicate commitment of support
- Make a plan
 - “Write questions down and I will make sure we have time to answer them when we talk next”
 - Set a time/date for the next meeting
 - Encourage them to get support
 - Prepare them for what will come next

How can we help?

- Opening up the conversation about emotions
 - e.g., it is really common for people in this situation...
 - Connect to appropriate supports (e.g., professional, peer, academic supports)
- Help the individual/family create their team and facilitate collaboration between team members

When should an individual seek more support?

- If symptoms are significantly interfering with functioning at home, school, work or socially
- If anxiety, depression, or behavioural concerns are interfering with medical needs



Conclusions

- More research is needed to better understand adjustment
- Adults and children with life-threatening arrhythmias are at higher risk for psychological distress
- Individuals can experience a range of emotions
 - There is no ***right*** way to cope
- Healthcare practitioners play a vital role in patient/family coping
 - It is important to recognize when additional emotional supports would be beneficial

