# Symptom perception management education improves self-care in patients with heart failure

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## ABSTRACT

**BACKGROUND**: Patients with heart failure (HF) have difficulty in recognizing signs and symptoms of the disease, which delay seeking for help and therefore interfere with patient's engagement and self-care management. Early detection of these symptoms could avoid hospitalizations and the associated health costs. Self-care is a naturalistic decision-making process where a person seeks to keep his/her health as stable as possible, by maintaining and managing self-care behaviors[1]. To improve self-care behaviors and avoid hospitalizations, patients with HF should routinely monitor themselves for signs and symptoms and recognize when to contact healthcare professionals. **OBJECTIVES**: The purpose of this study was to design a complex intervention, through a literature systematic review and a qualitative study. **METHODS**: The Medical Research Council complex intervention was used[2]. We combined a systematic literature review on education, symptom recognition, and self-care management in HF patients (PROSPERO: registration number CDD42018081708) with semi structured interviews to cardiology physicians, nurses expert in chronical disease management, and HF patients admitted into a cardiology ward in a university hospital[3], to design a complex intervention. **RESULTS**: The systematic literature review showed 582 studies published between 2005 and 2014, of which 17 were eligible to be fully analyzed. Only four were included in the final review. These suggested that patient education focused on symptom recognition, combined with reinforcements, led to better self-care behaviors. Meanwhile, content analysis of semi structured interviews revealed three themes: health management (related to patients knowledge about signs and symptoms of heart failure); behavior management (general lack of knowledge of the signs and symptoms of the disease); and support received (importance of regular clinic visits). **CONCLUSIONS**: Combining the findings of the systematic literature review and the themes emerged from the semi structured interviews, we proposed the development of a complex intervention on symptom perception and fluid management, to be implemented on a university hospital.

**Keywords**: *Heart failure, self-care, symptom perception, complex intervention.*

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