Effective communication between you and the healthcare professionals that look after you, is very important.

This is because management of heart failure is shared between the individual and their healthcare team\(^1\).

However, we know that communication is not always perfect. For example, we know that doctors and patients sometimes understand instructions in different ways\(^2\). That is another reason why you need to establish effective communication; so that any misunderstandings can be cleared up quickly.

Fortunately, you can take steps to make communication better. Please read on for some helpful tips.
ASK QUESTIONS!
Sometimes patients complain that doctors and nurses use complicated medical language (‘jargon’) during appointments, and that they don’t understand. If this happens to you, you must ask the person to stop, and to explain their point using more everyday language. Please do not worry about doing this; the doctor or nurse will be pleased that you have asked. After all, they want you to understand what they are saying!

SHARED UNDERSTANDING
One of the best ways to make communication effective, is to establish a shared understanding. In other words, you will get much more from your conversations with your doctor, if you have an understanding of heart failure.

As part of the patient support program for heart failure, we send you e-mails and text messages about various aspects of your condition. You may find it helpful to review these before appointments or other conversations with members of your healthcare team, so that you feel confident and well prepared.
FINDING SUPPORT
If possible, take somebody with you to appointments; perhaps a family member or friend who supports you. It can be helpful to have another person’s perspective. Also, it may be difficult to take in everything that is said during an appointment, particularly if you are not feeling well, so another person’s memory can be very helpful!

PREPARING FOR YOUR APPOINTMENTS
In the days before you go to the appointment, prepare a list of questions and/or issues you wish to discuss. If you are using a diary, you can record this list of questions. Take some time to think about how you have been feeling and how you have managed over the last days or weeks. What have you found difficult? Have you noticed any new or changed symptoms? Write all of these down and take them with you to the appointment.

If you are using a diary to monitor your progress, take it to every appointment you attend. The information that you record in your diary can tell your healthcare team a great deal about your health and how well you are managing your heart failure. It can also allow them to see where they need to offer you more help.

If you happen to have an urgent medical concern, please call your doctor, go to your local emergency room, or call your local Emergency Contact number. Remember, your doctor is your primary source for information on your condition and treatment. Be sure to speak with them if you have any questions or concerns.

References