Seniors Hospitalized for Heart Failure Up 230%

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NEW ORLEANS — The annual number of Americans aged 65 years or older hospitalized for heart failure jumped more than 230% between 1980 and 2006.

"Heart failure has reached epidemic levels. The prevention and treatment of heart failure have become an urgent public health need with national implications," Dr. Longjian Liu declared in presenting his analysis of 27 years' worth of National Hospital Discharge Surveys.

And the peak of the epidemic has yet to come, as the rate of increase will become even more pronounced in the near future, Dr. Liu said at the annual scientific sessions of the American Heart Association.

This trend is due to a combination of factors, including the explosive growth in the prevalences of diabetes, obesity, and chronic kidney disease; improved survival after MI; and the graying of America.

Indeed, the aging of the baby boomers will have an enormous impact on the heart failure epidemic. In Dr. Liu's study of the 1980-2006 U.S. experience, which included more than 2.2 million hospitalized patients over age 65 years, individuals aged 75-84 had an adjusted 2.3-fold greater rate of hospitalization for heart failure than those aged 65-69. Those aged 85 and up had a 4.1-fold greater rate than the 65- to 69-year-olds, and constitute the fastest-growing segment of the U.S. population.

For men aged 65 and older, the rate of hospitalization for heart failure rose from 16.6/1,000 hospitalizations in 1980 to 22.9 in 2006. Among women, the rate was 13.9/1,000 in 1980 and 19.6 in 2006, said Dr. Liu of Drexel University School of Public Health, Philadelphia.

The relative risk of being hospitalized for heart failure among seniors alive during the last 5 years of the study period was 37% greater than for those living in 1980-1984. ■