

# Nursing faculty links heart failure trajectory to caregiver and social issues

August 3 2020, by Brooke Killmon

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Two new American Heart Association (AHA) scientific statements led and co-authored by Lisa Kitko, Penn State College of Nursing associate dean for graduate education and associate professor, articulated that

heart failure-related issues, as they pertain to patients' caregivers, like financial and healthcare discrepancies, can significantly impact the patient's illness trajectory.

Additionally, Kitko also identified that [social determinants](#), such as food and housing accommodations, could affect illness trajectory and how providers can address and mitigate these issues with modern interventions.

With most individuals living with [heart](#) failure having to rely on unpaid support from their partners, [family members](#), friends or neighbors as caregivers to help manage their chronic disease, caregivers often struggle to keep up with the physical, psychological and financial demands of the role on top of the traditional demands of normal life.

In recent decades caregiving responsibilities have become more complex, involving treatment routines that have caregivers taking on responsibilities similar to those of healthcare professionals in the clinical setting. These increasingly complex duties play a critical role in the illness trajectory of the individual living with heart disease.

In the recent issue of *Circulation*, the official journal of the AHA, Kitko was lead author on a scientific statement that synthesized evidence about issues of the caregiving of adult individuals with heart failure. She also co-authored a second scientific statement that addressed the social determinants of health and the impact on patients with heart failure.

According to Kitko, the complexity of heart failure management is compounded by the number of patients who experience adverse downstream effects of these social factors. These patients are less able to access care and more likely to experience poor heart failure outcomes over time.

Kitko said her work highlights the significant gaps in current research and serves as a call to action for practitioners, academics and researchers for additional research in these critically important areas. These scientific statements also provide practitioners, academics, and researchers with the current state of the science related to social determinants of health that impact the care of persons with heart failure and the critically important role of caregivers in providing care and support to persons living with [heart failure](#).

"We [the authors] are all passionate about our areas of research," Kitko said. "Participation in these writing groups was affirmation of the important work that is done on a daily basis to improve outcomes for patients and families."

Kitko said her research is just one example of the innovative projects that are being conducted in the college to improve patient and family outcomes and is an example of the excellent nursing faculty that work on a daily basis to advance the science of nursing.

**More information:** Lisa Kitko et al. Family Caregiving for Individuals With Heart Failure: A Scientific Statement From the American Heart Association, *Circulation* (2020). [DOI: 10.1161/CIR.0000000000000768](https://doi.org/10.1161/CIR.0000000000000768)

Connie White-Williams et al. Addressing Social Determinants of Health in the Care of Patients With Heart Failure: A Scientific Statement From the American Heart Association, *Circulation* (2020). [DOI: 10.1161/CIR.0000000000000767](https://doi.org/10.1161/CIR.0000000000000767)

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