Section: Cardiology

Review Article

EMERGING FRONTIERS IN PHARMACOLOGICAL INTERVENTIONS FOR HEART FAILURE: A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF RECENT ADVANCES IN CHRONIC HEART FAILURE THERAPY

R. Sampath Kumar[1], S. Gopalakrishnan[2], M. Narendran[3], R. Aravazhi[4]

[1]Senior Assistant Professor, Department of Cardiology, Government Stanley Hospital and Medical College, Tamilnadu, India.
[2]Assistant Professor, Department of Cardiology Government Stanley Medical College, Tamilnadu, India.
[3]Assistant Professor, Department of Cardiology Government Stanley Medical College, Tamilnadu, India.
[4]Assistant Professor, Department of Cardiology Government Theni Medical College, Tamilnadu, India.

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Corresponding Author:
Dr. R. Aravazhi,
Email: aravazhi.dr@gmail.com.

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Abstract

Background: Heart failure is a complex condition characterized by the inability of the heart to pump blood efficiently, leading to various debilitating symptoms. Emerging therapies, such as angiotensin receptor-neprilysin inhibitors (ARNIs), have emerged as a superior alternative to traditional angiotensin-converting enzyme inhibitors (ACEIs) or angiotensin receptor blockers (ARBs). In addition to that, sodium-glucose co-transporter 2 inhibitors (SGLT2 inhibitors) have demonstrated remarkable efficacy in reducing cardiovascular mortality and hospitalizations in heart failure patients with or without diabetes. Moreover, personalized medicine approaches utilizing genetic and biomarker-guided therapy have shown potential in identifying patients who are more likely to respond to specific treatments. This abstract explores these recent advancements in pharmacological interventions that have aimed to improve outcomes and quality of life for patients with heart failure.

INTRODUCTION

Heart failure refers to a condition of cardiac illness in which, despite sufficient filling of the ventricles, the heart's ability to pump blood at a satisfactory rate, meeting the needs of the tissues while maintaining normal functional parameters, is reduced or compromised.[1] It is a clinical syndrome marked by symptoms (such as breathlessness, difficulty breathing while lying down, and swelling in the lower limbs) and signs (such as increased pressure in the jugular veins and lung congestion). It is frequently associated with a structural and functional cardiac anomaly that leads to decreased cardiac output and increased pressure within the heart.[2] It can arise from impaired systolic or diastolic function of the myocardium in the left (or also right) ventricle, valve disorders, irregular heart rhythms, congenital heart conditions, pericardial ailments, or a combination of these factors. Additionally, heart failure may also be related to ventricular dyssynchrony and cardiac arrhythmias.

Classification

Heart failure can be classified using various approaches:

Based on the timeline of symptom development- Acute or chronic

Based on functional severity- It is typically assessed using the New York Heart Association (NYHA) classification. This classification system categorizes the syndrome into four classes:

Class I: No limitations or symptoms during regular activities.

Class II: Mild symptoms present or experienced only during moderate exertion.

Class III: Mild activity can trigger the manifestation of moderate symptoms.

Class IV: Symptoms are apparent during periods of rest.

Based on clinical and hemodynamic characteristics- The European Society of Cardiology categorized patients into six groups (I–VI).[3] the majority of hospital presentations (over 90%) fell into the first three categories: acute decompensated heart failure (ADHF) (I), hypertensive acute heart failure (AHF) (II), and AHF with pulmonary edema (III). ADHF patients typically exhibited mild to moderate symptoms while those with AHF and pulmonary edema (III) experienced respiratory distress and hypoxemia, with varying degrees of severity ranging from low-output states (IVa) to cardiogenic shock (IVb). High-output failure (V) was relatively rare and associated with conditions such as anemia, thyrotoxicosis, and Paget's disease. It presented with warm extremities, pulmonary congestion, and also in cases of systemic sepsis and hypotension. The classification system also included a category for right-sided heart failure (VI), primarily affecting patients with pre-existing lung disease and cor pulmonale. However, acute myocardial ischemia/infarction involving the right ventricle was also considered within this group.

Prevalence and Incidence

Globally between 17% and 45% of individuals who are hospitalized due to heart failure experience mortality within one year of admission, with a majority yielding within five years of their admission.[4] The prevalence of heart failure (HF) was found to be significantly higher in cases where congenital heart disease coincided with conditions like malnutrition and pneumonia. Research indicates that around 40% of children diagnosed with symptomatic cardiomyopathy progress to the severity of HF that necessitates transplantation or results in mortality.[5] In economically developed countries heart failure constitutes approximately 1-4% of all hospital admissions when considered as the primary diagnosis. However, this estimation is likely to be lower than the actual prevalence due to the possibility of heart failure being documented as a secondary diagnosis or potentially going unrecorded, particularly among a significant proportion of patients who also have other cardiovascular conditions.

Pathogenic Mechanism

The pathogenesis of heart failure involves the activation of neurohumoral responses following injury to the heart muscle. This activation includes the adrenergic nervous system and the renin-angiotensin-aldosterone system. It leads to the death of heart muscle cells, causing the remaining cells to enlarge and the left ventricle to progressively dilate, resulting in fibrosis of the heart muscle.[6] This process, known as left ventricular remodeling, increases the demand for oxygen in the heart, leading to further damage and initiating a harmful cycle. Activation of this system causes constriction of blood vessels, reduced excretion of sodium and water, fluid overload, and swelling, adding more stress to the heart. Increased oxidative stress generates reactive oxygen molecules that promote the enlargement of heart muscle cells, induce cell death, contribute to fibrosis of the heart muscle, and activate inflammatory responses.[7] additionally, it affects the regulation of calcium, electrical remodeling pathways, and activation pathways in individuals with heart failure. All these changes are crucial factors in the development of heart failure.

Current Standard of Care

Recommended Pharmacological Treatment Protocol

Pharmacological treatment forms the basis of managing heart failure and should be prioritized over device therapy. It should also be implemented in conjunction with non-pharmacological therapies. It requires a comprehensive treatment approach consisting of various drug combinations to serve as the fundamental treatment strategy for enhancing symptoms and prognosis in all patients.[8]

S.No	DRUG CLASS	DRUG NAME	MECHANISM
1.	Angiotensin-Converting Enzyme Inhibitors (ACEIs)	• Enalapril • Captopril • Lisinopril	Inhibit the synthesis of angiotensin II by blocking the angiotensin-converting enzyme (ACE)
2.	Angiotensin Receptor Neprilysin Inhibitors (ARNIs)/ Angiotensin Receptor Blockers (ARBs)	• Valsartan	Improve ventricular Remodeling
3.	Beta-blockers	• Bisoprolol • Carvedilol • Metoprolol	Lowering the quantity of vasoconstrictors in the blood improves myocardial contractile performance.
4.	Aldosterone receptor antagonists	• Eplerenone • Spironolactone	Reducing sodium and water retention.
5.	Loop Diuretics	• Furosemide	Inhibit sodium reabsorption
6.	Sodium-Glucose Co-Transporter Inhibitor (SGLT2)	• Dapagliflozin • Empagliflozin	Inhibit sodium-glucose co-transporter 2 (SGLT2)
7.	Positive inotropic agents	• Digoxin	Increase myocardial contractility (positive inotropic effect)
8.	If-channel inhibitors	• Ivabradine	Inhibit the "If" current in sinoatrial node cells. [9].

Non- Pharmacological- Device Therapy

Apart from the implementation of pharmacological interventions, there are numerous non-pharmacological approaches utilized for treating patients suffering from heart failure. One of the paramount interventions is cardiac resynchronization therapy (CRT) in managing cases of HF. CRT restores the heart's contraction pattern,

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reducing cellular, hemodynamic, and structural adaptations due to desynchronization. This improves functional status, and quality of life, and reduces hospitalization while enhancing survival rates in severe heart failure patients.[9] Moreover, for individuals with heart failure (HF) and atrial fibrillation (AF), atrioventricular nodal ablation combined with CRT device implantation is a viable option if rhythm control strategies prove ineffective or undesirable, and ventricular rates remain persistently high despite medical treatment. [10] In comparison to medication-based therapy, catheter ablation significantly reduces mortality rates in HF patients with AF.

Furthermore, in individuals with severe renal insufficiency and heart failure, the progression to the uremic stage occurs when diuretic medications prove ineffective, necessitating the need for dialysis. Dialysis not only alleviates the symptoms associated with renal insufficiency but also provides relief for heart failure.[11]

Challenges Associated With Emerging Therapies

Despite advancements in treatment, the rate of hospital admissions for heart failure, adjusted for age, continues to increase at a yearly rate of approximately 10%, especially among individuals aged 65 and older.[12] Existing therapies have been unable to effectively manage this upward trend, and a successful strategy to curb this issue remains unidentified. Heart failure is a comprehensive medical condition that necessitates a multidisciplinary approach to achieve optimal management. The expenses associated with heart failure management are high, particularly when considering the costs of managing concurrent conditions.

Novel Drug Therapies

The novel therapeutic approach holds promise in restoring stable cardiac function through the replenishment of depleted membrane proteins or the regulating intracellular calcium levels. While challenges related to its long-term effects have impeded its progress, there remains a strong probability of its success.

S. No	NOVEL DRUG NAME	CLASS	MECHANISM
1.	Omecamtiv mecarbil	Cardiac Myosin Activators	Binds strongly to myosin's catalytic domain, altering ATP hydrolysis and favoring ADP-P. [13].
2.	Ularitide	Natriuretic peptides	A synthetic derivative of urodilatin, a peptide hormone produced by the distal tubule and collecting duct cells of the kidney in response to elevated pressure. It attaches to NPR-A receptors, leading to enhanced diuresis and natriuresis. [13]
3.	Tolvaptan	Vasopressin V2 receptor antagonists	It impacts the collecting ducts and promotes diuresis, resulting in an increase in urine volume without altering electrolyte excretion.
4.	Serelaxin	Protein Based Therapies	It initiates a G protein-coupled receptor pathway in endothelial cells of blood vessels by attaching to either LGR7 or LGR8 receptors This binding activates and enhances the expression of vascular endothelin B receptor, vascular endothelial growth factor (VEGF), and the production of nitric oxide. [14].
5.	Cardio Trophin- I	IL-6 cytokine family	In laboratory settings, CT-1 promotes the development of osteoclasts in coculture by triggering the production of RANKL in cells derived from the osteoblast lineage.

Evidence and Comparison of Emerging Therapies to Standard Treatments

The available evidence indicates that the administration of all novel heart failure drugs can enhance the prognosis of heart failure. The ARB regimen, in particular, appears to have the greatest efficacy in improving both all-cause mortality and cardiovascular mortality. It should be pointed out that the ARB and SGLT2i treatments exhibit similar effectiveness in enhancing the rate of cardiovascular death or rehospitalization due to heart failure.[15] The statistical significance of the clinical effectiveness of the three innovative medications for heart failure has been established, however, there is an absence of direct comparison regarding the efficacy of the novel treatment regimen for heart failure.

Possible Treatment Targets and Pathways

The heart failure phenotype comprises various components that may be regulated differently and could potentially be treated through therapeutic intervention. These components encompass cardiac hypertrophy, disturbances in excitation-contraction (EC) coupling, compromised cardiomyocyte viability, disrupted protein balance, oxidative stress, energy dysfunction, arrhythmia, extracellular matrix modification, and chamber desynchronization.[16] Exploring the therapeutic potential of heart failure phenotype components that have not been previously targeted could yield valuable results. However, it is important to acknowledge that there is a significant absence of proven therapies that effectively reduce mortality in heart failure conditions.

Novel Cardiac Regeneration Approaches.

Stem Cell Therapy

Utilizing stem cells to promote myocardial healing is considered a novel approach to treating heart failure. Research has indicated that the therapeutic effects of stem cells are mediated by the paracrine action of exosomes, highlighting the distinctive therapeutic capabilities of exosomes.[17] Stem cells possess two significant attributes that distinguish them: the capacity for self-renewal and the potential to differentiate into multiple cell types. As they progress in development, stem cells undergo maturation and acquire specific cellular functions. However, during this process, they also gradually lose their capacity to differentiate into multiple cell lineages. In the field of regenerative medicine, comprehending the range of potency within each stem cell category and their underlying mechanism of action is crucial. Varied levels of specialization exist among cells, leading to variations in factor secretion, cell marker expression, and cellular function.[18] Certain cells can be directly injected into the desired tissue, facilitating engraftment, direct differentiation, and replacement of the impaired cells. While the effectiveness of stem cell therapy remains relatively limited, the safety profile of cell therapy seems acceptable. It is crucial to encompass the various factors currently restricting treatment efficacy to enhance and optimize stem cell therapeutic regimens in the future.

Gene Therapy

The exploration of novel therapeutic strategies for heart failure is of utmost importance, and gene therapy has emerged as a promising alternative. Recent progress in comprehending the molecular mechanisms underlying myocardial dysfunction, coupled with advancements in more effective gene transfer technologies, has brought gene-based therapy within grasp for the treatment of heart failure. The infusion of genes into the coronary artery along with temporary occlusion of both a coronary artery and a coronary vein resulted in improved gene expression within the myocardium. This approach demonstrated the ability to preserve left ventricular function and hinder ventricular remodelling in heart failure models.[19] Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that even brief period of ischemia carries inherent risks for patients with advanced heart failure. Ante-grade arterial infusion percutaneous coronary artery catheterization is a well-established and minimally invasive procedure that enables homogeneous gene delivery to all regions of the heart. This approach offers significant advantages, including its minimal invasiveness and relatively high safety profile, making it particularly appealing for end-stage heart failure patients. However, patients with severe coronary artery disease may encounter challenges in gene delivery. Furthermore, the efficiency of ante-grade coronary gene transfer can vary due to the rapid passage of the vector through the blood vessels.[20]

INDUCED PLURIPOTENT STEM CELLS

Extensive research has been conducted on induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSCs), embryonic stem cells (ESCs), and skeletal muscle myogenic cells for their potential application in cardiac disease. The primary objective is to facilitate cellular-level repair of the heart. Cardiomyocytes derived from induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSCs) possess functional characteristics similar to native cardiomyocytes, including contractility, spontaneous beating, and expression of ion channels. The transplantation of cardiomyocytes derived from iPSCs is anticipated to enhance cardiac function by contributing mechanistically to cardiac contraction and exerting trophic effects.[20]

Targeting inflammation and immune dysregulation

Role of inflammation in heart failure

In the pathogenesis of heart failure, particularly heart failure with preserved ejection fraction (HFpEF), inflammation assumes a pivotal role. Significantly, inflammation can exhibit both advantageous and detrimental consequences, dependent upon its extent, site, and duration. Moreover, the inflammatory reaction facilitates the initiation of regenerative mechanisms after acute myocardial damage. The progression of heart failure can also be directly influenced by immune modulation, such as in response to autoimmune or infectious triggers-like viral infection. While the inflammatory response is necessary to initiate the regenerative process following acute myocardial injury, persistent and long-term inflammation has detrimental effects.[21] During the healing phase, key features include the presence of M2 macrophages, a decrease in monocytes and myofibroblasts, which aid in wound healing, the formation of new blood vessels, the prevention of further tissue damage, and the development of reparative fibrosis in the area affected by the infarction. Chronic inflammation may arise due to either persistent inflammation that continues beyond the healing phase or a subsequent reactivation of inflammatory processes.

IMMUNOMODULATORY THERAPIES

In the heart, both the innate and adaptive immune responses are triggered when tissue damage occurs due to pathogens or environmental factors such as ischemia or hemodynamic overload. The innate immune system offers a broad, non-specific defense against pathogens and tissue injury, while the adaptive immune system mounts a specialized response mediated by B and T cells, offering a high degree of specificity.[22] Additionally, B cells exert their biological influence by modifying cardiac function via the release of chemokines. Checkpoint inhibitors function by enabling immune responses against cancer cells; however, they can also activate the immune system in a broader sense, resulting in increased inflammation that may potentially harm various organs. One notable adverse effect of checkpoint inhibitors is the development of myocarditis, characterized by immune-mediated inflammation of the cardiac muscle. However, it remains uncertain whether immunotherapy induces other adverse cardiovascular effects.

CLINICAL OUTCOMES

Achieving pharmacological control over inflammation to reduce cardiovascular events is challenging due to the limited efficacy or unintended adverse effects observed with numerous agents designed to modulate the inflammatory response.

PRECISION MEDICINE AND PERSONALIZED THERAPIES

ROLE OF PHARMACOGENOMICS IN OPTIMIZING DRUG SELECTION

Pharmacogenetics investigates how individual genetic variations influence the response to drugs in a clinical setting. In patients with heart failure, genotype may also impact the likelihood of experiencing adverse reactions to specific therapeutic interventions. The primary objective of assessing patients' genotype and expression profiles is to improve disease detection, prevention, and treatment while minimizing unwanted effects. The continuous progress in identifying more prevalent genetic variants that modify diseases and treatment approaches will provide valuable insights into the underlying pathophysiology and facilitate the rational prioritization and application of suitable therapies.[23] The ongoing reduction in the cost of genome sequencing, along with the routine inclusion of genotyping in clinical trials, will further enable the implementation of clinical genomics in various medical applications.

TAILORING THERAPIES BASED ON INDIVIDUAL PATIENT CHARACTERISTICS

Genetic variability in response to heart failure treatment exists and genetic information may complement conventional clinical information in tailoring therapy to an individual patient, ultimately improving outcomes. The emergence of efficacious novel medications for heart failure (HF) has highlighted the growing significance of patient phenotyping, as certain individuals may be unable to tolerate certain drugs.

Patients diagnosed with heart failure (HF) exhibit a wide range of variations in terms of congestion, hemodynamic status, and kidney function. Hence, it seems rational to tailor or prioritize medications based on individual patient profiles, ensuring that each patient receives the full advantages of guideline-directed medical therapy (GDMT).

a. Patients who have HF with atrial fibrillation and normal blood pressure- The ideal resting ventricular rate for heart failure (HF) patients with atrial fibrillation is still not definitively established, but it is potentially within the range of 60 to 80 beats per minute (bpm). Anticoagulation is recommended for all patients with atrial fibrillation (AF) unless the risks outweigh the potential benefits or there are specific contraindications to these medications
b. Patients who have HF with CKD- Chronic kidney disease (CKD), characterized by an estimated glomerular filtration rate (eGFR) less than 60mL /min/1.73 m2, impacts approximately 4.5% of the general population but can affect up to 50% of individuals with heart failure (HF). CKD poses twice the risk for overall mortality, making it a more powerful prognostic indicator than left ventricular ejection fraction (LVEF). During the progression of HF, dynamic changes in eGFR may arise, necessitating careful consideration when interpreting its implications.[23] Beta blockers (BBs) can be administered safely to patients with an estimated glomerular filtration rate (eGFR) as low as 30 mL/min/1.73 m², offering a distinct advantage in terms of reducing mortality. Studies have demonstrated the efficacy and safety of dapagliflozin and empagliflozin in enhancing cardiovascular and renal outcomes in patients with an estimated glomerular filtration rate (eGFR) greater than 20-25 mL/min/1.73 m².

VII. COMPLEMENTARY AND ADJUNCT THERAPIES

ROLE OF EXERCISE BASED REHABILITATION PROGRAMS

Individuals with heart failure undergo significant decreases in their ability to exercise, leading to negative impacts on their performance of daily activities, health-related quality of life, and ultimately their rates of hospitalization and mortality. In case of patients with systolic heart failure (HF), exercise training is recognized as a valuable complement to an evidence-based management program. It has the potential to bring about beneficial changes in various aspects such as maximal VO2, central hemodynamic function, autonomic nervous system function, peripheral vascular and muscle function, and exercise capacity. These adaptations contribute to a training effect, enabling individuals to achieve higher peak workloads at a lower heart rate during sub maximal exertion.[24] Exercise training does not appear to enhance cardiac output during sub maximal exercise in individuals with heart failure (HF). However, there are observed effects of training, such as a delay in reaching the ventilatory threshold—a consistent measure of cardiovascular fitness—and achieving it at a higher oxygen consumption (VO2) level. Pulmonary artery pressure, pulmonary capillary wedge pressure, and systemic vascular resistance remain unchanged following training, both at rest and during exercise.[26] regarding left ventricular (LV) diastolic function in patients with systolic dysfunction, exercise training has shown a significant reduction in LV diastolic wall stress at lower work rates (50% of peak VO2). Individuals with heart failure undergo significant decreases in their ability to exercise, leading to negative impacts on their performance of daily activities, health-related quality of life, and ultimately their rates of hospitalization and mortality.

NUTRITIONAL INTERVENTIONS AND DIETARY SUPPLEMENTS

Individuals diagnosed with heart failure (HF) necessitate the implementation of dietary measures, including the limitation of sodium intake and the cultivation of wholesome eating patterns, to alleviate symptoms and effectively manage their long-term condition. Individuals diagnosed with HF

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frequently encounter comorbidities such as obesity, diabetes, and chronic kidney disease. Consequently, they may commonly experience inadequate intake of essential micronutrients, including minerals and vitamins, due to dietary restrictions imposed on sodium and fluid consumption. Research has demonstrated that omega-3 fatty acids effectively lower the likelihood of sudden death resulting from cardiac arrhythmias and reduces overall mortality rates in individuals diagnosed with established coronary heart disease. Additionally, omega-3 fatty acids are utilized in the treatment of hyperlipidemia and hypertension. Flaxseed, canola oil, soybean oil, and walnuts are rich sources of this fatty acid. Incorporating omega-3 fatty acids into the diet through food is the optimal approach since food naturally contains additional beneficial compounds. For instance, fish is abundant in arginine, glutamine, and selenium, all of which can provide advantages to cardiovascular health and blood vessels.[26]

ROLE OF ACUPUNCTURE IN HEART FAILURE

Acupuncture, a conventional therapy within Traditional Chinese Medicine, has demonstrated favorable impacts on the cardiovascular system through a neurohumoral pathway referred to as the long-loop pathway. The utilization of acupuncture in combination with medications for congestive heart failure (CHF) has been found to enhance treatment efficacy. This is substantiated by evidence from color Doppler echocardiography, alterations in blood urea nitrogen and creatinine levels, as well as exercise tolerance tests. Evidence from clinical trials involving human subjects has consistently indicated that acupuncture can induce notable effects on the cardiovascular system and serve as an efficacious treatment option for various cardiovascular disorders.[26]

VIII. CHALLENGES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

SAFETY AND TOLERABILITY OF EMERGING THERAPIES

In contrast to the absence of a correlation in terms of effectiveness measures, substantial evidence suggests that the use of concomitant treatment can impact the safety and tolerability of primary medications for heart failure with reduced ejection fraction.

COST- EFFECTIVENESS

The expenses associated with the management of patients with heart failure (HF) have experienced significant growth in the last two decades. This increase can be attributed, in part, to the introduction of new medications and diagnostic tests, higher rates of hospitalization, the utilization of expensive innovative devices, and the consideration of interventions such as heart transplantation, mechanical circulatory support, and end-of-life care as the disease progresses. Cost-effectiveness analyses provide a valuable means of measuring the connection between clinical results and the economic consequences of existing treatments.

REGULATORY CONSIDERATIONS AND APPROVAL

The regulatory considerations and approval process for emerging therapies in heart failure involve rigorous evaluation to ensure safety and efficacy. Regulatory authorities, such as the FDA in the United States, assess clinical trial data, including study design, patient population, and statistical analysis, to determine the therapy's benefits and risks. They also review manufacturing practices and quality control measures. Successful approval requires demonstrating substantial evidence of the therapy's effectiveness and a favorable risk-benefit profile, ultimately ensuring patient safety and access to innovative treatments for heart failure.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, recent advancements in pharmacological interventions for heart failure have brought about significant improvements in patient outcomes. The introduction of novel drug classes, such as SGLT2 inhibitors and cardiac myosin activators, has expanded treatment options. Furthermore, promising techniques like stem cell therapy, gene therapy, and immune-modulatory approaches have shown potential in cardiac regeneration and inflammation control. Precision medicine and personalized therapies, along with complementary and adjunctive strategies, play vital roles in optimizing patient care. Collectively, these recent advancements pave the way for a more tailored, effective, and patient-centered approach to managing heart failure, improving both quality of life and prognosis. However, addressing challenges related to safety, regulatory considerations, cost-effectiveness, and accessibility remains crucial.[27] Moving forward, continued research and development efforts, with a focus on synergistic approaches and the seamless integration of emerging advancements into clinical practice, will drive the future of heart failure management, ultimately benefiting patients worldwide.

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