

**OBJECTIVE:** To analyze the underlying aetiology, precipitating factors and certain socio-demographic determinants in patients admitted to Kenyatta National Hospital, Nairobi in congestive heart failure. **DESIGN:** Cross sectional descriptive study. **SUBJECT:** All patients aged thirteen years and above of either sex consecutively admitted with clinical diagnosis of congestive heart failure. **SETTING:** Kenyatta National Hospital (KNH), a national referral hospital. **PATIENT EVALUATION:** Detailed history including socio-demographic characteristics and physical examination was done. Patients underwent haematological and biochemistry tests followed by a chest x-ray, ECG and 2D Echo-doppler examination. Blood culture sensitivity was done when clinically indicated. **RESULTS:** Ninety one patients were studied, 44 males and 47 females. Almost 32% had rheumatic heart disease, 25.2% had cardiomyopathy, 17.6% hypertensive heart disease, 13.2% had pericardial disease while 2.2% had ischaemic heart disease. Three quarters of patients with hypertensive heart disease were above the age of 50 years, while 79% of patients with rheumatic heart disease were below the age of 30 years. Factors associated with patient deterioration leading to admission with congestive heart failure (CHF) included inadequate therapy (27.4%), arrhythmia (20.9%), respiratory infections (17.6%), anaemia (13.2%) and infective endocarditis. Sixty two per cent of patients investigated were in New York Heart Association (NYHA) functional classification class IV, 31.9% in class III and 5.5% in class II. **CONCLUSION:** Congestive heart failure constitutes 3.3% of all medical admissions at KNH. Rheumatic heart disease is the commonest cause of congestive heart failure in our set-up while inadequate therapy, arrhythmias and respiratory infections are the three major causes of decompensation in our patients with cardiac disease.