Common medical terms for cardiology

**Angina** - Medical term for chest pain or discomfort due to coronary heart disease. Angina is a symptom of a condition called myocardial ischemia. It occurs when the heart muscle (myocardium) doesn't get as much blood (hence as much oxygen) as it needs for a given level of work. Insufficient blood supply is called ischemia. Stable angina (or chronic stable angina) refers to "predictable" chest discomfort such as that associated with physical exertion or mental or emotional stress. Rest and/or nitroglycerin usually relieve stable angina. Unstable angina refers to unexpected chest pain and usually occurs at rest. It is typically more severe and prolonged and is due to a reduced blood flow to the heart caused by the narrowing of the coronary arteries in atherosclerosis. Unstable angina is an acute coronary syndrome and should be treated as an emergency.

**Atherosclerosis** - A form of arteriosclerosis in which the inner layers of artery walls become thick and irregular due to deposits of fat, cholesterol and other substances. This buildup is called "plaque." As the interior walls of arteries become lined with these deposits, the arteries become narrowed, reducing the blood flow through them. Eventually the plaque can erode the wall of the artery and diminish its elasticity. Plaque deposits can also rupture, causing blood clots to form that can block blood flow or break off and travel to another part of the body. This is a common cause of heart attack and stroke. If a clot blocks the blood supply to the arms or legs, it can cause difficulty walking and eventually gangrene if not treated.

**Atrial fibrillation** – A disorder of heart rate and rhythm in which the heart's two small, upper chambers (atria) quiver rapidly like a bowl of gelatin and empty blood into the heart's lower chambers (ventricles) in a disorganized manner instead of beating effectively. Paroxysmal atrial fibrillation (PAF) is a condition in which an irregular heartbeat occurs periodically. Permanent AF is a condition in which a normal heart rhythm can't be restored with treatment.

**Cardiomyopathy** - Cardiomyopathy is a chronic disease of the heart muscle (myocardium), in which the muscle is abnormally enlarged, thickened, and/or stiffened. There are three types of cardiomyopathy. Dilated cardiomyopathy, in which the heart muscle becomes weak and the heart chambers subsequently dilate. Hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, in which the heart muscle itself is much thicker than normal. Restrictive cardiomyopathy, in which the heart becomes stiff and cannot fill efficiently during diastole, the period of the heartbeat when the chambers fill with blood.

**Carotid bruit** - An abnormal sound in the neck of a person with carotid artery disease, created by the blood as it flows through the diseased artery.

**Cholesterol** - A soft, waxy substance found among the lipids (fats) in the bloodstream and in all the body's cells. It's an important part of a healthy body because it's used to form cell membranes, some hormones and is needed for other functions. Cholesterol and other fats can't dissolve in the blood. They have to be transported to and from the cells by special carriers
called lipoproteins. There are several kinds, but the most important are low-density lipoprotein (LDL or “bad”) and high-density lipoprotein (HDL or “good”).

**Congestive heart failure (CHF)** – inefficiency of cardiac circulation

**Coronary artery bypass graft (CABG)** - Surgery that reroutes (bypasses) blood around clogged coronary arteries and improves the supply of blood and oxygen to the heart muscle. It's sometimes called open-heart surgery or CABG (for coronary artery bypass graft) or “cabbage.”

**Coronary artery disease (CAD) also termed ASHD** - Conditions that cause narrowing of the coronary arteries, reducing blood flow to the heart muscle. A type of atherosclerosis. Severe cases can result in heart attack.

**Deep vein thrombosis (DVT)** – Formation of a blood clot (thrombus) in a deep vein, primarily in the leg

**Diastolic dysfunction** - Diastolic dysfunction is when the heart loses its ability to relax, as a normal heart would be able to.

**Diastolic heart failure** - Diastolic heart failure is a form of heart failure in which the heart's lower chambers (ventricles) have become too stiff to relax and expand to fill with enough blood.

**Dyspnea** - Difficult or labored breathing, often caused by heart conditions. Two types of dyspnea are significant in cardiac illness. Dyspnea on exertion (DOE) is the shortness of breath that occurs with increasing activity. Paroxysmal nocturnal dyspnea (PND) is a shortness of breath that awakens a person at night from sleep. Both are significant symptoms in cardiac disease.

**Edema** – Swelling due to an abnormally large amount of fluid in the intracellular body tissue spaces. Edema is common in the legs, ankles and lungs of people with heart failure.

**Heart murmur** - An abnormal sound in the heart caused by defective heart valves or holes in the heart walls. The sound is made by blood circulating through the heart's chambers and valves, or through blood vessels near the heart.

**Hypertension** – A chronic increase in blood pressure above normal range. Blood pressure is the pressure of the blood against the walls of the arteries. Optimal blood pressure is less than 120/80 mm Hg. High blood pressure, or hypertension, is a condition in which blood pressure levels are consistently above the normal range.

**Hypotension** – The medical term for abnormally low blood pressure.

**Ischemia** – Insufficiency blood supply

**Myocardial infarction** - Medical term for heart attack. It is the damaging or death of an area of the heart muscle (myocardium) resulting from a blocked blood supply to that area.

**Myocarditis** – Inflammation of the heart muscle, the myocardium.
**Palpitations** - The sensation of the heart beating rapidly or irregularly.

**Pericarditis** - A disorder caused by inflammation of the pericardium, which is the sac-like covering of the heart. It's usually a complication of a viral, bacterial or fungal infection. It can also result from a heart attack, cancer, injury or surgery.

**Peripheral vascular disease (PVD)** - The term peripheral vascular disease is commonly used to refer to peripheral artery disease (PAD), meaning narrowing or occlusion by atherosclerotic plaques of arteries outside of the heart and brain. The symptoms of peripheral artery disease depend upon the location and extent of the blocked arteries. The most common symptom of peripheral artery disease is intermittent claudication, manifested by pain (usually in the calf) that occurs while walking and dissipates at rest.

**Premature atrial contraction (PAC)** – A contraction in the atrium which is initiated by an ectopic focus and occurs earlier than the next expected normal sinus beat.

**Premature ventricular contraction (PVC or VPD)** – A contraction in the ventricle which is initiated by an ectopic focus and occurs earlier than the next expected normal sinus or escape rhythm beat.

**Sinus rhythm** - The normal rhythm of the heart.

**Stenosis** - The narrowing of a valve or an artery. A stenotic valve does not open completely and therefore it obstructs or blocks blood from moving through it normally. A stenotic artery results in an obstruction of blood flow through it to the organs of the body.

**Syncope** - The medical term for fainting. Syncope is a sudden and transient loss of consciousness which has many causes. Ultimately most causes of syncope produce a dramatic fall in blood pressure which leads to fainting. Nearly half of all Americans will experience at least one episode of syncope during their lifetime. Syncope occurs in people of all ages from young children to elderly patients.

**Systolic heart failure** - form of heart failure in which the heart's lower chambers (ventricles) have become too weak to contract and pump out enough blood to meet the body's needs, resulting in shortness of breath and other heart failure symptoms.

**Tachycardia** – Abnormally fast heartbeat (more than 100 beats per minute).