DANIEL YIP: Dr. Daniel Yip, medical director for heart failure and heart transplant in Mayo Clinic in Florida. Cardiomyopathy is a condition where the heart muscle is weakened. There are various different factors that could cause the heart to be weakened, and the result of the weakening of heart is congestive heart failure. Congestive heart failure is fairly common. About 1% to 2% of the population in the United States have congestive heart failure.

Viral cardiomyopathy is one type of cardiomyopathy. It is not communicable-- so that a person who has viral cardiomyopathy will not transmit that to the other person. The causes of viral cardiomyopathy is often unclear. There are certain types of viruses that we do know that could attack the heart directly or indirectly, resulting in cardiomyopathy. It's not often that we actually find the virus. Many times, people use the term viral cardiomyopathy when it actually isn't caused by a virus.

People sometimes might have a low grade temperature, they may have a sore throat, they may have a cough, which may or may not be related to the cardiomyopathy. But because they have this constellation of symptoms, often doctors will say they have a viral cardiomyopathy, when indeed it may not be actually due to the virus.

Cardiomyopathy as a diagnosis is fairly common in the population. 1% to 2% of the general population carries a diagnosis of cardiomyopathy or congestive heart failure. Of those people who have cardiomyopathy, viral cardiomyopathy is a very small percentage of the total. It is fairly difficult to diagnose because often we don't actually find the virus. The virus could attack the heart muscle directly or the effect of the virus could affect the heart muscle indirectly.

The treatment for viral cardiomyopathy is no different than the treatment of any other type of cardiomyopathy for the most part. There are no specific treatments against a specific virus. So we usually use different medications that are generally accepted as being evidence-based medications for the treatment of cardiomyopathy. For example, ACE inhibitors, angiotensin receptor blockers, beta blockers, spironolactone, are different medications that we may use for the treatment of cardiomyopathy.

If there is congestion-- meaning too much fluid in the body-- sometimes a diuretic could be used for the treatment of cardiomyopathy. Just because people have the diagnosis of cardiomyopathy, it's not necessarily a fatal diagnosis. Most people with a diagnosis of cardiomyopathy do survive. They do lead very meaningful, very full lives. And just because someone is hospitalized with cardiomyopathy, it does not necessarily mean that it's a fatal diagnosis.