

My First Day at the Dialysis Clinic



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Even though I was anxious with a capital "A", I think I was more depressed than anything. When I arrived at the center, I sat down and was busy surveying the waiting room. There was a TV in the room, but I couldn't begin to tell you what was playing, a table with magazines and information on dialysis and then there was an informational rack on dialysis.

As I sat in the room, I think my depression slowly turned to anger. I was mad. I was mad at the world and was trying to decipher why. The facility smelled like medicine; I didn't like that either because it was definitive about

where I was and what I was there for. As I was sitting and waiting for a staff member to call my name to begin the dialysis treatment, I began reminiscing about my mom and her dialysis days. I recalled the challenges that she had met, then I remembered my aunt, who was in a wheelchair, caused by diabetes. I thought about another aunt that was on peritoneal dialysis; it was just overwhelming. Then the tears slowly rolled down my cheeks.

At that time, the manager entered the waiting room and stopped to say hello when he noticed the tears. I just nodded my head - I didn't want to talk to him, I didn't want to talk to anybody. When he saw the tears, he acted as though he didn't see them and kept talking.

Finally I was called. In this room, I saw a roomful of people laying on recliners, dialysis machines, sinks, a large scale and staff in white coats. I was asked to weigh. I was considerably underweight and still very weak. The atmosphere appeared congenial. The staff members were conversing with the patients as though they were very familiar with each other. I was very caught up in my own self-pity, but not before I noticed the demographics of the people there at the center.

I observed mostly over 50 year old people, black, mostly black, some white and some Hispanic. What I found profound was the number of people that lay on the recliners without limbs. They looked so sad helpless. So I got depressed all over again and the tears started flowing again. Again, I thought about my mom becoming an amputee from diabetes/dialysis issues and my aunts who became amputees as well. As strange as it may sound, I wanted my mom to be there with me and not dead. My husband wasn't able to be with me. I was also hurting for those people who lay and appeared so lifeless.

As the staff was starting my dialysis treatment, they attempted to be overfriendly seeing that I was so quiet and withdrawn. They would talk to me and I wouldn't answer; I just acted as though I didn't hear them. What a jerk, what a jerk I was in my own self pitying world. I was not acting as though I was raised by a strong Black woman, not at all but actually six (6) women (mom's sisters) and my dad. That was a lot of disciplining.

As I was laying there for the four (4) hour dialysis treatment, the social worker came over to speak with me. She was in the process of sitting down when she saw the tears and was getting ready to get up when I decided to try to be more considerate. After all, she was just trying to do her job. So I said to her "it's okay, you can talk to me". It was so funny because she acted like she wanted to get up as fast she was attempting to sit down, in other words, she changed her mind about sitting down. So she talked to me about the program through tear drenched tissues and I listened but wasn't really interested even though it was for my welfare.

Another staffer attempted to be overly, overly friendly. The more friendly she attempted to become, the more I wouldn't talk to her. So then she said to me, "have you looked through your bag to see the goodies you have?" I didn't answer. Then she started going through the bag telling me about the different accessories there, the head microphone for the TV, a blanket - I noticed everyone was using a blanket. I wondered about that. When she pointed out the blanket, I said to her "you mean I didn't have to beg to take my hospital blanket home" and it was then we both just burst out laughing. After that, that staff and I conversed a lot. She really went the extra mile to communicate with me. I was still mad, but not as much.

As I waited, I watched as patients left, their stations (recliners and dialysis machine) were cleaned.

Preparation for the dialysis treatment meant mixing chemicals and verifying with two staff that the artificial kidney belonged to the patient. Vital signs were taken -- sitting and standing. The dialysis site is cleaned prior to treatment. If necessary, per doctor's orders, medications and/or iron and heparin are added. My site was still in the subclavian (neck area). Insertion of a catheter in the subclavian area is temporary. Because of infection purposes, it is recommended that you move it to a permanent place within three or four months.

Taber's Medical Dictionary, 21st edition, defines dialysis in this manner:

" peritoneal dialysis as dialysis in which the lining of the peritoneal cavity is used as the dialyzing membrane requiring less complex equipment and less specialized personnel than hemodialysis, little or no heparin, no blood loss and minimal cardiovascular stress. It is used to treat renal failure and less commonly, certain types of poisoning, hypothermia or heatstroke".

"Hemodialysis as "the use of an artificial kidney to clear urea, metabolic waste products, toxins and excess fluid from the blood. It is used to treat end stage renal failure, transient renal failure and some cases of poisoning or drug overdose".

If you choose to continue to hemodialysis, placement will usually be in the arm. Treatment is usually at a clinic.

If you choose peritoneal dialysis, then a catheter is inserted in the peritoneal cavity - self-care - performed by the patient.

I passed out as the blood was leaving my body, and into the machine to be cleansed. When I awakened, I was surprised that I had been actually asleep - it just sneaks up on you.

After the dialysis treatment, I weighed again. It's important to get a pre (before) and post (after) weight so you can decipher how much fluid was removed. You have to be very careful about bending over because of the matter of equilibrium. I had to walk with a gaited walk (manner of walking) - very slow, very measured. I was afraid if I lost my balance I wouldn't be able to get up without help. When leaving the dialysis treatment area, I almost dropped something and the staff person yelled "I'll get it, don't bend over". I drove home to complete my familial obligations.

Dinner was light that evening because I was so unsure of myself. I had so much to tell my husband. I think he felt he could feel my pain, but the truth in the matter is that there was no pain, but more a feeling of fatigue. The triple lumen catheter (in my neck) looked threatening, but it was harmless. My husband asked me; "when you do dialysis does it hurt?" I replied; "no" with a smile. I felt bad for him because I know he felt so helpless being unable to give me physical assistance. He didn't realize it, but just being supportive was a blessing for me. Just being there for me was ample. And that he was for twenty six (26) years.

Life is life - it is what it is.

Until the next time ...

