

## **Kidney Care is a very Personal**

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Kidney care can quickly become the business of your spouse, mom, dad, sister, brother, cousin or friend's business.

Allow me to introduce myself to you via this website. In these web journals, I will be writing about my personal experiences as well as sharing my professional knowledge/research of kidneys, disease prevention, public education and in essence kidney care. I will try to write and explain as best as I can in layman's terms.

Not only will these writings be informative, but also an opportunity for you to share your story and possibly communicate with others with the same dilemma. We can all learn from each other.

The previous generation in my maternal family succumbed to kidney failure as a result of diabetes. My mom and two of her sisters were affected by this disease.

The story I am about to share with you is a true story.

My kidney failure was discovered with a simple test called an echocardiogram (a test in which ultrasound is used to examine the heart). My life was a busy one of family, work, errands, etc. I had gone to my primary doctor who monitored my hypertension, had been given an EKG (electrogram(a test measuring the electrical activity of the heart over time captured and externally recorded by skin electrodes). This test had resulted in irregular results. I really didn't think it was anything out of the normal, after all, I was hypertensive. I thought to myself I've been hypertensive all of my adult life, so what was the big deal. The primary doctor had referred me to the cardiologist who administered the echocardiogram; the results were abnormal. The cardiologist then informed me I needed to go to the hospital right away. He said I had developed a condition called pericardial effusion (fluid around the heart).

I informed the doctor that I was unable to go to the hospital right away because of some spousal home obligations. My husband had chronic obstruction pulmonary disease (COPD) and was also wheelchair bound - I couldn't just go to the hospital without making home preparations. He then asked when I could go to the hospital and I said later to which that response seemed to satisfy him. The cardiologist said if you don't go right away, it would not be good. I then replied to him "how not good". He said not good. So I said okay, went home, did household chores, attended to my wheelchair bound husband and went to bed. I thought I'll go in the morning, which is what I did. As I was on my way to the hospital, the doctor's office telephoned to see what was happening. I informed them I was en route.

When I arrived at the hospital, I had to hear from three different staffers "you were supposed to be here yesterday". I just gave them this look at though to say "and?". So anyway, I checked into the hospital and while waiting for things to process, decided to look up my condition on the internet on my laptop. I was a little surprised to see that with the pericardial effusion, it said if not attended to, you have sudden death. I swallowed hard.

The very next day I had surgery. It was when I returned to my room that I was told that my kidneys were nonfunctioning. I'll expound on that later.

I began to reminiscence when the kidney failure symptoms began. I remember the (edema (excess fluid), feeling cold in the summer and then remembering how tired I was feeling. I thought okay so I could use a water pill and then maybe some iron for the fatigue. I justified the fatigue to just the strain of caregiver duties.

I had all the symptoms of kidney failure but ignored them to complete the tasks at hand. Had I paid more attention, there was a possibility there could have been some type of intervention rather than causing hardship on my heart (fluid backing up) and then dialysis and just a more complicated life. If I had just paid more attention ...

Excuses excuses caused a permanent change in my life.

When I returned to my room from surgery, I was placed in the intensive care unit(ICU, and discovered I had a lot of new additions to my body, i.e. a triple lumen catheter in my subclavian (chest area), a chest tube and a foley catheter (indwelling urinary catheter) -- I thought wonderful. A nephrology (kidney) nurse informed me I had blown out my kidneys from the hypertension. I said to her so what happens now. She said you will have to go on dialysis and I said to her when, to which she replied "immediately".

She continued to talk but I couldn't hear anything she said. I was in total disbelief. A shiley (dialysis catheter) was placed in my subclavian (neck area). This is normal practice to start dialysis catheter in that area. I'll expound on the different sites in another writing. So I had to receive emergency dialysis removing a tremendous amount of fluid. My initial dialysis treatment was a blur. When they started to remove the blood from my body, I became quite sleepy and would awaken with the replacement blood. I was still very ill from the heart surgery and to be quite honest with you, didn't really care. This entire scenario was overwhelming to me.

By the time I had my second dialysis treatment, I was more cognizant of what was occurring. My nephrologist (kidney doctor) seeing the expression on my face said to me "you can do this. She continued by saying I've been doing this for 40 years".

I just looked at her with no response because I was thinking about my family, my career, my new life.

When I was returned to my room, a physical therapist assisted me with walking. Hemodialysis causes a drastic fluid shift and, and therefore, I was walking like a puppet on a string - equilibrium totally off - it was really weird.

Depression set in. I thought I'd be returning to work in a couple of days, instead I was off for months recuperating from the heart surgery coupled with the adjustments of dialysis (the body is very weak). Once so active and now I couldn't sit up by myself. I used the electric bed to assist me with sitting up. I examined the surgical scars on my body; I could feel the triple lumen catheter in my neck.

You know they say everything happens for a reason. I couldn't for the life of me rationalize the reason.



But now I know that amidst the struggles, that I can do this. Part of the reason I feel I will be successful is that I have a strong support system, i.e. family, friends, a mentor, doctors and nurses. I can also appreciate everyone that chose to share a kind word, deed or their time. Support is fundamental. I feel blessed. I hope I can help others in the manner that I have been blessed.

I'm thankful to have had the opportunity of not only sharing my experience with others but possibly giving guidance and perhaps learning more about this organ and the manner it affects other organs as well.

Next article I will discuss getting discharged from the hospital and my first day at the clinic with my new artificial kidney.

Until next time ..

Thanks.

Margie

