



RENAL OUTREACH

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Meaningful Employment is Possible!

By Leslie DeBaun, **Patient Leadership Committee, Board of Trustees**

My diagnosis of renal disease was made only 3 months before I went into End Stage Renal Disease. Just 4 years prior to that diagnosis my husband and I had bought our dream home and had plans for helping our teenage and young adult children complete school.

Professionally, I was at the peak of my career both in income and national recognition. However, the company I worked for had been sold and during the months between my diagnosis and ESRD this newly re-invented “dotcom” was failing.

My adjustment to the illness and rapid decline kept me from seeking another job. As was expected, a week after starting on dialysis, my employer informed the staff we had one day of employment left. It was an extremely difficult time for our whole family.

The adjustments to living with chronic illness, an uncertain future, loss of income and new medical bills affected each of us profoundly. For the first six weeks I was depressed and did little more than focus on my illness and concern for family members.

As I adjusted to my new life, the need for employment became a priority. I felt strongly that I had to help pay my medical costs and wanted to continue to help our children with education.

I applied for unemployment compensation and began the work of finding a job. The right job for me had to be close to home to allow me time to rest and time for dialysis. One job for which I interviewed, not only fit the criteria but was in an area for which I had achieved recognition and had references from some of the top people in the country.

I had always done well in interviews and was used to receiving positive feedback. However, I had decided to share with the potential employer that I was on dialysis and going to be on a transplant list.

Immediately after giving that information, I knew they did not want me. In fact, I felt they could not wait to get me out of the office.

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Meaningful Employment (con't)

I would like to share that I bounced back after that interview, but I was feeling down and did not take any action for a few weeks. The medical bills kept coming. I felt insecure about approaching potential employers.

Because I knew of an employment agency in the area that took a personal interest in others, I made an appointment with them. In addition to taking the usual information for a job search, they recommended I speak with one of their temporary personnel people, Carole.¹

Carole's good friend was on a transplant list; she understood the challenges of chronic illness. Carole arranged for a temporary job at a local hospital under the supervision of a nurse.

Through that temporary job I was able to demonstrate that I was a productive and valuable worker. The hospital hired me after 5 months of temp work. They sent me on two trips with other employees as I lugged my peritoneal dialysis machine through airports and set up my nightly regimen.

Accommodations were made during the time of my transplant surgery and healing process. It has not always been easy. To get time off for post-transplant clinic visits out-of-town I've worked 10 hour days for 4 days to get the 5th day off.

Our lifestyle has been simplified; no longer is it important to have "executive clothing" or a meal in a fancy restaurant. The trade-off is that I have more time at home and am closer to my family. I am in a new profession and am enjoying education towards certification in my new field.

¹ Fictitious name