In a previous Renal Outreach (Winter, 2002), there was an article about family stress along with the results of a recent survey on the same issue.

In both of these articles it stated that “dealing with kidney failure is a family affair” and that most families feel alone and unsupported.

I can attest to all of that for my daughter has renal disease. I am not only a mother but also a nurse. Not that that should make a difference — but to most people including me, it made a big difference.

As the story begins, my daughter was diagnosed with renal disease at the age of seventeen to the shock of everyone including myself. It was at that point that my life began to change --- some for the good and some for the bad.

For two years she was controlled with medication. No one thought a whole lot about it except me. To my daughter, I became the ultimate nag and basically alienated her from me.

By focusing on my daughter, I often overlooked my son’s needs. Eventually he began to experience bouts of anger against me.

It wasn’t until my daughter’s kidneys began to fail that reality set in for everyone. It was at that point that things began to spiral down for me.

The feeling of “being alone” descended on me like a cloak. As did all of the tormenting questions like, “What had I done wrong as a mother? And, How can I fix this; can I fix this?” And then there was the anger.

My extended family was not very supportive. Their thinking ran along these lines: "If we don’t see them, then we don’t have to deal with it.” Mainly, what they wanted to know was if their children could catch this or not. There was no — “How can we help?” or, “What can we do for you?”

Some of the relatives took the opportunity to bring out some old sore points like, “If you would have just stayed home and not worked then none of this would have happened.”

Logically it made no sense but of course it made me feel guiltier.
To make matters worse, I would argue with my husband for not supporting me but in actuality he didn't know how to help. Meanwhile, my son just became more distant.

It was one weekend after a typically bad week — her starting dialysis, arguing with my husband, no support from my family, my son being mad at me, and my daughter looking sicker than I had ever seen her before — that I thought about just giving up.

I went to meet one of my friends. I began talking to her about my fears and feelings of being alone. She suggested that I talk with someone, saying, “If you can’t get yourself together than you can’t help anyone including your daughter and family that need you.”

It was at that point that I went to speak to a psychologist who sat and listened, who helped me understand it was not my fault and who helped me identify and redirect my anger so that I could do — what I could and needed to do. Talking things through helped me get myself together. Things aren’t perfect but they are more manageable.

I know that I am not the only person feeling this way. I want you to know that you are not alone. It’s not your fault. We all have our ups and downs. When you feel like "you’re going down for the count" talk to someone.

For support, all we need is to STAND TOGETHER!

SYMPTOMS
OF DEPRESSION

Newly diagnosed patients and their family members often experience a sense of sadness and loss. These feelings may be a part of a normal grief reaction.

During this period, the patient or family member may feel unable to cope with life in general. Gradually, the reality of kidney failure is accepted. The feelings of sadness begin to lift.

At this point, patients and family members are able to learn how to adjust and adapt successfully to the changes brought about by kidney failure. If, however, grief and loss give way to a real sense of despair which lasts for some time, a professional consultation may be needed.
Depression can happen to anyone at any time. It's important to know some of the general symptoms.

The following list provides some of the major warning signs. Experiencing four or more of these symptoms for over a two-week period may mean it's time to ask for help. Some of these symptoms could also be typical of kidney disease, so it may take a medical professional to help sort it all out.

Keep this list handy and review it from time to time.

_A simple checklist of symptoms:*

- A persistent sad, anxious or “empty” mood
- Loss of interest or pleasure in ordinary activities, including sex
- Decreased energy, fatigue, feeling “slowed down”
- Sleep problems (insomnia, oversleeping, early-morning waking)
- Eating problems (loss of appetite or weight, weight gain)
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- Feelings of hopelessness or pessimism
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, or helplessness
- Thoughts of death or suicide; a suicide attempt
- Irritability
- Excessive crying
- Recurring aches and pains that don’t respond to treatment

* Adapted from the National Institute for Mental Health literature