



# RENAL OUTREACH

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## *Patient Leadership Committee Family Focus Series*

### **Role Reversal**

By Guy Tibbels

*(Pictured on right is Guy and Rose Tibbels with son, Guy II "Tug" and daughter, Annie.)*

What is role reversal? In a family, what does it mean? Is there really men's work – women's work? Should the man always be the main breadwinner of the family? In today's world does it really matter?

I can't answer these questions for you individually. Everyone has their own perceptions about how they want to live their lives.

But when you and your family face a challenge like kidney failure involving daily dialysis, fistulas, catheters, and transplants - family roles start to change. Chronic illness affects how you live your daily lives and how you must look at your future.

Currently, in our family, my wife Rose has the full-time job, as an elementary school guidance counselor. That is the job with the benefits.

Myself, due to a few challenges (diabetes for 20 years, kidney failure and 2 transplants), I've had to steer away from full-time jobs.

During the summer months I own and operate a daily charter fishing business and help manage our family-owned marina. I coach football in the fall and substitute teach during the winter.

I maintain an active schedule, but one that I can mix and match according to meet my needs.

As a family, we've reached a balance that works for us. But there were a few bumps in the road along the way.

In the beginning, it was just Rose and myself. The first six years of my kidney pancreas transplant went smoothly. So the role reversal thing was present but not really prominent.

But then the transplanted kidney failed and the daily challenges increased.

It was back to frequent doctor visits, to taking more medication, to going on dialysis, to getting on the transplant waiting list, to getting retransplanted and to going through recovery one more time.

At the same time Rose now faced some challenges of her own - a one year old in diapers and another one on the way, her regular full-time job, and taking care of me. Actually, she had to take over all of the family roles in one capacity or another.

Talk about a triple whammy!



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After a while, coping with this type of situation can eat away at a person by tearing away at the family's image and self-worth.

#### IF YOU LET IT!

If role-reversal is something that bothers you whether male or female, patient or caregiver, family member or friend - what do you do?

Again, I can't give you an answer. You have to find what best suits you, your family and your situation.

But I can offer some pointers, ideas and ways of looking at things that helped my family take control of what could have been a very negative situation.

When tackling role reversal, keep in mind some of the following:

- 1) Be realistic - learn to accept things as they are and deal with it in a positive manner;
- 2) Give it your best - accept only your best effort and never be satisfied with mediocre attempts;
- 3) Be grateful for what you have - always look at your glass as being ½ full and never as ½ empty;
- 4) Talk it out - when feeling down, talk to someone who understands and when it's all out, let it go and get right back on track;
- 5) Set goals - for yourself and as a family; write them down, discuss them, check them off as you achieve them, review and change them as needed;
- 6) Use common sense when making decisions - don't plan a ten-hour day because that's what you are *used to doing* when your energy level allows for only a four-hour work day along with a required nap;
- 7) Accept help - learn to let others, especially family, give you a helping hand no matter how small; it gives them a sense of involvement and helps reduce their feelings of helplessness;

8) Evaluate yourself - make sure you're not taking the easy way out by say, "I can't do this because I'm sick;" don't be a whiner or carry a chip on your shoulder; check it out and see if that's a defense, your way of coping with fear and anger;

9) Be a good listener – others who share in your care (caregivers) especially need to express and share their thoughts and feelings with someone – particularly you.

10) Be a team player - work hand-in-hand with caregivers, doctors and nurses; it's important to make your needs known and to express your point of view but it's equally important to listen, take in a different perspective and trust.

11) Maintain a positive attitude, it's the key to success when dealing with kidney disease or any other challenge that may confront you or your family. Attitude affects the way you think, feel and act. So watch what you say – use *challenges* instead of *disease* and *illness* and say, "It's a slow day" instead of "It's a bad day."

12) Be mindful of who you are – role reversal may mean that you are no longer the primary breadwinner or main caregiver but it doesn't mean that you lose your place in the family. You are still the father or mother; you are still a husband or wife. Your role and your identity are not the same thing.

Hopefully these ideas will be useful to you. Refer to them. Try them. Work on solutions. Role reversal may present a challenge to the family. But the more you talk things through and keep an open mind, the less stress will be felt by you, your family and friends.

Learn to look at every challenge as an opportunity to grow as a family. It will help you cope not only with role reversal but with any other obstacles you and your family may face.