Nancy Spaeth: A Little History and a Lot of Hope
Nancy is a registered nurse and has lived with kidney disease since 1959. Prior to starting dialysis in 1966, Nancy had to undergo a screening by the Admissions and Policy Committee (also called ‘The Life and Death Committee’) in Seattle, WA. All patients were reviewed for dialysis in those days before Medicare paid for treatments. The committee looked for people who could recover and go on to work or be contributing members of society. Returning patients to their prior level of functioning is the reason Medicare began to pay for dialysis. Dr. Belding Scribner testified to Congress at that time that, unless a patient was rehabilitated, the treatment was inadequate. He emphasized that most patients who received funding would be on home dialysis or transplanted, and would be taxpayers. “We had a vocational counselor at my kidney center, and I received assistance with my education and career, first as a schoolteacher, and later as a nurse. Throughout my adulthood, I continued to work and support my children. I retired from my nursing career in 2011, but still substitute teach, and nurse per diem. I never really liked the term ‘Life and Death Committee.’ I always considered it a ‘Life Committee.’ They chose me to live – and with that privilege there was a responsibility to realize my full potential. All I ever wanted was a normal, decent life with my children and the opportunity to give back to society at least as much as I have been given. I continue to strive toward that end.”

Esther Jones: Nurses do it with Care
I hadn’t figured out how it would happen, but I was thinking about going back to school to study chemistry before I learned I had kidney disease on my 32nd birthday. Most of the work I had been doing was either as a musician, housework or yard work. I was ready to move on to a career, but kidney disease hit acutely and I found myself bedridden with 50 pounds of extra fluid on my body. As soon as I got the fluid off, I began working on a plan to be self-sustaining and have some extra money to help my mother. About a year later, one of my friends who worked for VR told me about it. I applied and went to an appointment with a VR counselor right away. I had a kidney transplant, and took a job as a medical scribe, while going to school full time. I graduated with a nursing degree from OHSU about 4 years after going back to school. Medicare continued to pay for my transplant medications beyond the usual 3 years, because I had been active in VR before my transplant. VR paid for most of my education, all of my books, and all other expenses related to getting a job after graduation. Now I work as a home dialysis nurse and train patients and their families to do peritoneal dialysis.
Gary Moore: My Journey with Vocational Rehabilitation

When I consider my journey with VR, I recall a time before I could have fathomed needing such a service. My father was a laborer and instilled in me a desire to work with my hands, become a jack of all trades and most importantly provide for my family. However, having more academic as opposed to physical attributes, I joined the Air Force. In 1984 I began my career as an Inventory Management Specialist, supply clerk for short. I was stationed at JBER in Anchorage, Alaska. I met my wife Yalanda in Alaska, and we had our first child Icy in 1988. I was reassigned to Japan in 1989 just before the birth of Garyll, my second child. Due to Garyll's medical problems, I left Japan and the Air Force in 1990 to start my civilian life in Alaska. I took a job making $7.50/hour as a warehouseman at a rigging shop, and advanced to shop supervisor then foreman – thanks to my father’s example of a good work ethic. My work involved long hours and hard days. We had our third child Shampayne in 1996, and then became foster parents of 4 more children – Roland, Damonta, Michael and Jashala. In 2012, just 3 days after my 46th birthday my life took a new path. Hours after arriving at the hospital with what I suspected was a stomach flu, I was told I had a heart attack, 3 strokes and my kidneys had failed. My life on peritoneal dialysis began a few months later. I joined the Northwest Renal Network PAC in 2013 to add my voice to the many other voices that have come together to better the lives of kidney patients. I went back to work in May of 2014, but soon discovered that I could not continue as a rigging specialist. In August of 2014 I was introduced to VR by my dialysis social worker. My VR counselor made sure I had a laptop and printer and covered any college related expenses, and I enrolled in a Retail Management Program. Thanks to VR, my lifelong dream of attending college is fulfilled and I have a new lease on life. VR is making it possible for me to return to the workforce and continue to be the man my father exemplified. I am currently listed for a kidney transplant and have a potential donor. An interesting twist in all of this – my daughter Shampayne attended college with me. She told me if I could go to college, she could too.

Talk to your social worker about your lifestyle goals, and they can help you to get started.

More about the PAC

Network 16’s patient advisors work on various Network projects focused on improving patient safety and experience of care. Without their help, the Network would not be able to effectively achieve our mission to promote optimal dialysis and transplant care for kidney patients in Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington.

Northwest Renal Network can help navigate your journey with kidney disease.
Contact us for information and assistance with:

- Concerns about care
- Patient rights
- Questions about employment and dialysis
- Treatment options
- Transplants
- Travel and dialysis
- Access to our library of resources

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