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What I Learned from PD

In November of 1997, my body started to change. I found myself tired all the time. I was only 17 years-old and working at a local restaurant. Little by little, I started to notice a change in my body. I started to gain weight; at least that's what I thought. My mother would bring it to my attention that something was wrong. This is because every morning I would awake to find my hands and eyelids very swollen.

But I figured it was because I was eating too much salt and was retaining water. But as the weeks went on, my whole body started to swell. I remember the day I realized that this wasn't normal. I was going to take a shower and as I was preparing to take off my shoes, I laid my arm on my leg. As I did this, my arm made a dent in my leg. I was very scared at this point and began to cry.

I began to wonder what was going on with my body and immediately made an appointment with my physician. My doctor performed a urine test and told me that there was protein in my urine. She prescribed prednisone and told me that my kidneys were leaking protein, instead of keeping it. I continued to think that I would be fine and that this medicine was going to make me better.

A few weeks went by and then one morning I awoke, looked in a mirror and noticed how swollen my head and face had become. I found it difficult to get out of bed and had to call for my sister. We called my physician immediately and she admitted me into the emergency room of a local hospital. They performed a kidney biopsy because they knew it was a problem with my kidneys.

I remained in the hospital for quite some time and continued to feel my life would soon return to normal. My family members and friends were always around and they were so supportive. I was later introduced to a new doctor from UCLA who told me they were going to put me on cyclosporine.

As time went on, they released me from the hospital because they removed all the fluid from my body. I was required to take albumin infusions every other day; however, I was starting to feel back to normal except for the sudden mood swings that were a result of my medication.

By June of 1998, doctors explained to my mother that I would have to begin dialysis because nothing was working. I really didn't know what dialysis was except that it was a type of treatment. I was sent to UCLA to meet my new nephrologist.

They explained hemodialysis and peritoneal dialysis treatments. The main nurse recommended CCPD, mostly because of my age and the fact that it was considered a flexible treatment. I agreed with her recommendation to try peritoneal dialysis. My attitude was "I'm going to do what I have to do."

I was informed that my doctor felt my kidneys should be surgically removed. During my surgery, they removed both kidneys and inserted the CCPD catheter. They also inserted a permacatheter so I could perform hemodialysis while the other site healed.

I was released and told I would have to receive hemodialysis treatment every other day. I went to the treatments but mentally I was just coming and going and not really grasping everything. Finally, after about two months, I started to learn how to perform CCPD.

I had a hard time adjusting to it and almost had to make myself do it. Sometimes, I would try to create ways to avoid doing it. But when I did this, I always felt worse. About this time, I started to battle depression. It was difficult for me to accept all these changes into my life when I was always so healthy. Things had happened so fast; everything had taken place within a brief period of six months.

I decided I might be better able to cope with this illness if I went to see a professional counselor once a week. As a result, I started feeling very confident and my self-esteem began to improve. I began to understand that everyone has challenges and obstacles in their lives and this was mine.

Little by little, I grew to accept peritoneal dialysis as a part of my daily routine, like taking a shower. I remembered what my healthcare team told me during training and I was interested in what was happening to my body and what was taking place during these exchanges.

I have recently started training to become a hemodialysis technician. I have adjusted to peritoneal dialysis and feel very confident with my life because I know that I can choose to do anything with myself, despite my illness.

Also, I enjoy helping people become more involved with their healthcare. I know firsthand that chronic illnesses require adjustments. I tell people that you have to get involved in the process in order to make yourself healthier. I recommend they learn about all their options and try to gain perspectives from as many people as possible. I can honestly say that my adjustment to PD wasn't easy but it gave me a new insight into myself.

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