

A Challenging Diagnosis

Faydra Fuller | Spokane Valley, WA

Faydra was diagnosed as diabetic when she was 11, back in 1990.

"I landed in a coma in April of 2004 for four days because of that," she said. "That did damage to my system that led to – four years later – a diagnosis of 12 percent kidney function."

After surviving the coma, Faydra experienced extreme water retention. Her legs swelled up and in some cases her skin cracked open because of it. Because her kidneys had failed, her body could no longer dispose of the water she didn't need. Her doctor at the time did not recognize this as a symptom of kidney failure.

Faydra demanded she see another doctor and they run a full blood test. It was at this time she was diagnosed with kidney failure.



ESRD requires a patchwork of programs to pay for care

Treatment for ESRD will often disrupt someone's life to the point where it can be challenging to maintain a career, and in turn makes it challenging to afford health insurance. While many ESRD patients would like to keep working, they're often left with no choice to but to file for disability to qualify for Medicare.

Faydra was diagnosed as disabled because of her diabetes prior to her kidney failure. Now, she utilizes a patchwork of social programs to afford her additional end stage renal disease (ESRD) treatment programs. She is enrolled in the state Medicare program as well as the state Medicaid program to cover the cost of her treatment.

"They've got all these weird little abbreviations and stuff for them," Faydra said. "Half the time, if you don't know about them, you can't find them. When I landed in the coma, the hospital helped me find a bunch of assistance through [the state]."

Faydra now goes to a dialysis center in Spokane to have in-center hemodialysis three days a week. She spends about five and a half hours of her day in total going to and from the center and receiving her treatment. She says it's almost like having a part-time job.

Transplants are not always a care option for ESRD

Faydra ultimately decided not to have a transplant due to the complications she might incur, and the large lifestyle shifts she would need to make.

"I decided that at my age, give it to someone younger who's going to benefit from it more. With my diabetes, unless they do a combination transplant, my diabetes would just kill the new kidney," Faydra said.

Because symptoms of ESRD are similar to other conditions, its often missed even though there are simple tests that can diagnose ESRD.

Including coverage of kidney disease screening in the Medicare wellness visit would drastically improve rates of early diagnosis of ESRD.