



WAVY-TV (NBC)

Norfolk, VA

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Health Headlines:

A medical crisis is looming for kidney patients. More than 8,000 people in Virginia are on dialysis.

It's estimated that number will quadruple in the next 25 years and Medicare's program for covering dialysis treatments may soon go bust. Stephanie Harris investigates that problem. Here is the problem.

Dialysis treatments in Norfolk cost about \$450. But Medicare only pays \$134. Now, if I go into a store and pick up a quart of milk that can cost \$1.25 and give the cashier 50 cents she's not going to give me my milk but the dialysis centers are required to give those treatments, so they have to eat that \$316 difference or make it up in other ways.

More and more people need dialysis to stay alive. This Norfolk Dialysis Center is full six days a week. I have to be here three days a week, 3 1/2 hours each day. It's like a part-time job. Only Kevin doesn't get paid for it. Dialysis centers say neither do they. At least not enough to cover their costs. Medicare is not reimbursing us adequately.

In 1972 the government decided to pay for dialysis treatment but back then only about 5,000 people needed it? Now there are almost 400,000 people on dialysis and I still have patients that are living into the 80's that I still do. It's keeping patients alive longer and taking a big chunk of Medicare's money...

[STORY CONTINUES]