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Approximately 400,000 Americans suffer from kidney disease. Of those, 310,000 rely on dialysis – an expensive and exhaustive treatment – to stay alive. In the Tri-State area, the number of those on dialysis is also rapidly increasing. K-MEG's HealthWatch reporter Jackie McPherson has more on why kidney disease is on the rise.

MCPHERSON: Lorraine Dawsen has been a dialysis patient for 8 years this Fall.

DAWSEN: Diabetes caused me to lose my kidneys and it's been kind of a rough road."

MCPHERSON: After a failed kidney transplant, Lorraine began coming to Siouxland Dialysis for treatment.

DR. OUI: When your kidney fail then your waste product accumulates. And what it does is to remove the waste product instead of the kidney."

MCPHERSON: Dialysis can be a grueling process. Patients must sit for 4 hours, 3 days a week as their blood is filtered by these machines."

DAWSEN: Once we get off dialysis, we're tired. Almost all of us have to take a nap.

MCPHERSON: Diabetes is the leading cause of kidney failure – accounting for nearly half of all cases at Siouxland Dialysis. As obesity has risen in the Tri-State, so has the incidence of diabetes and, thus, kidney failure. Whereas today there are 175 patients at Siouxland Dialysis:

DR. OUI: We started probably 25 years ago with about 15.

MCPHERSON: And Oui says almost all of them rely on Medicare to cover the cost of dialysis – posing financial problems for facilities like Siouxland Dialysis.

Oui says Medicare payments only cover 130 dollars of the treatment – the same amount Medicare covered 20 years ago, though improvements in technology make dialysis a much more expensive procedure to administer today.

A group of dialysis providers have put together the "Kidney Care Quality and Improvement Act of 2005" in hopes of seeing Medicare's coverage policies change. That legislation is pending. In the meantime, patients like Lorraine are trying to make their dialysis experience a little more positive.

DAWSEN: We do get really close here. It almost becomes like a family.

MCPHERSON: Jackie McPherson, K-MEG News.