

DAILY NEWS

Healthy dose of attention Pols push for kidney-care bill

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When Willie Cureton started dialysis treatment at Elmhurst Hospital Center after her kidneys failed, she was "in bad shape," she said.

"I thought I was a goner," she added.

But after seven months of treatment, she said, "I feel 100 % better than when I came in here."

Saving - and improving the lives of - kidney disease patients had been the mission of the hospital's Hemodialysis Department and is now the goal of a bill introduced to Congress in March.

In an effort to promote the passage of the Kidney Care Quality and Improvement Act - which would enhance education, funding and training - Elmhurst Hospital Center yesterday invited two local City Council members to visit and tour its Hemodialysis Department.

"Our mission today is to heighten the awareness," said Hemodialysis head nurse Doreen Gatanas, of the Hemodialysis Department. "Dialysis is not the end of the world, not the end of life. It's a new beginning of a different life."

During dialysis treatment, chronic patients who suffered kidney failure hook up to a machine that does the work of kidneys, cleaning the blood of toxins. The session takes about four hours and is repeated three days a week. The only other alternative treatment is a kidney transplant.

Council members Helen Sears (D-Jackson Heights) and John Liu (D-Flushing) met with medical staff, visited the dialysis unit, which serves 42 outpatients, and promised to land support for the congressional bill.

"We'll push through a resolution in the City Council," Liu said. "We see more and more people in the community needing dialysis."

The chief causes of kidney failure are high blood pressure and diabetes, both of which are side effects of the obesity epidemic sweeping the nation. About 400,000 Americans suffer from the ailment, and the number is rising.

"What's amazing to me is how it can be prevented," Sears said. "We need to deal with preventive medicine and education."

Sears and Liu also heard from John Basile, 48, who has been on dialysis treatment for more than five years. He told them about the difficulties patients are facing, like language barriers, mistrust and lack of knowledge about the disease.

They spoke with other patients, including Cureton, 72, of East Elmhurst, who was sitting on a bed wearing a purple dress, two tubes connected to her arm.

"You are in good hands now," Sears told her.