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Carlisle man survives 30 years on dialysis

Carlisle man celebrates life 30 years after his kidneys stopped working

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Jack Reynolds is a lucky guy. Very lucky.

Granted, he has to drive three times a week from his home in Carlisle to a Des Moines dialysis center. Then he has to stick a large needle in his right arm and sit for four hours while a machine pumps his blood out and cleans it. And, of course, it's been a pain to do this for three decades straight.

But Jack Reynolds is 52 and he's alive. If the 1974 farm accident that crushed his kidneys had happened a decade earlier, before dialysis treatment became commonplace, he probably wouldn't have survived long. The question would have been if he was going to die from the fluid building up in his lungs or the excess potassium threatening to shut down his heart.

"I just really lucked out, all the way around," Reynolds said Monday as he prepared to hook himself up on the 30th anniversary of his first treatment.

The staff at the DaVita dialysis center, next to Iowa Methodist Medical Center, bought him a cake and a bowl of punch to celebrate. They believe he is their longest-surviving patient.

Dr. Craig Shadur, Reynolds' nephrologist, said most dialysis patients have diabetes or other serious illnesses that cause their kidneys to fail. Each year, 15 percent to 20 percent of them die, he said. "So having someone last 30 years on dialysis is really the exception."

People often escape dialysis after having a kidney transplant. Reynolds was told that a transplant probably wouldn't work for him. He suffered too much internal damage when a large water tank rolled over him in the long-ago accident.

Transplant operations have become safer since then, and he still might consider one if he becomes seriously ill. But, he said, so far, so good.

Unlike many dialysis patients, Reynolds prefers to handle his own needle. It gives him a sense of control over the situation.

It's fairly easy to hit a good spot, because doctors performed an operation that created a forearm vein the size of a small garden hose. And sticking yourself doesn't hurt that much after you've done it a few hundred times.

Reynolds laughed as he recalled how he took control of his treatment. He was still a young man, he explained.



GARY FANDEL/THE REGISTER

Cause to celebrate: Jack Reynolds, 52, right, celebrates with Dr. Craig Shadur, who has been his nephrologist for 24 years. Reynolds has lived with the assistance of dialysis for 30 years.

Kidney disease

The National Kidney Foundation says more than 20 million Americans have chronic kidney disease, and more than 20 million more are at increased risk.

SYMPTOMS: In early stages, kidney failure often shows no symptoms, but doctors can detect it with simple tests.

AT RISK: Those most at risk include diabetics or people with a family history of diabetes; people with high blood pressure or a family history of it; African-Americans, Hispanics, Pacific Islanders and Native Americans; and senior citizens.

DIALYSIS: Only those with the most serious

"I wanted to show off for a nurse one time, so I did it myself," he said. "They made such a big fuss over it. I didn't have the guts the next time to say, 'No, I'm not going to do it again.' "

He figures he'll be making the 14-mile drive to the dialysis center for years to come. Holidays don't stop him. Neither do snowstorms or floods.

Reynolds sat in a blue recliner Monday, watching the blinking, beeping machine next to him. By the end of four hours, it would remove several pounds of excess fluid and suck the energy out of him.

"I feel like I've done a hard day's work," he said, "when actually all I've done is sit here."

He smiled. A cup of coffee would pick him back up, he said.

And, after all, a little fatigue sure beats the alternative.

cases need dialysis, in which a machine cleans the blood.

PREVENTION: Prevention strategies include controlling blood pressure and blood sugar, quitting smoking and losing excess weight.

ON THE WEB: To find out more, go to www.kidney.org.

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