

Dialysis center in works for Payson

By [Carol La Valley](#), Roundup staff reporter

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When kidneys fail, the human body begins to poison itself. Toxic waste products can no longer be filtered from the patient's blood and -- as in any poison emergency -- time becomes an enemy.

"If someone (in the Payson area) goes into renal failure right now, they come to the emergency room and are airlifted to a hospital in the Valley," said Judy Baker, director of Mogollon Health Alliance.

Richard Haddad/Roundup

Working in conjunction with Payson Regional Medical Center, Judy Baker of Mogollon Health Alliance is determined to bring a dialysis center to Payson.

Even in nonemergency situations, kidney patients in Rim Country must constantly balance their lives, traveling to a distant dialysis center three times a week.

It takes approximately six hours for a dialysis machine to do the work of a human kidney -- cleansing 12 pints of blood. When you add a 2-hour round trip commute to Scottsdale or Phoenix, many patients become slaves to a treatment routine for which there is no escape except to relocate.

Whether it's an emergency or a scheduled appointment, the lack of a dialysis center in Rim Country is a growing concern for patients and health professionals. But the long drives and added risks could be a thing of the past.

"We have done the physicians' needs assessment and it was very positive," said Harvey Pelovsky, administrator of Rim Country Health and Retirement Community. "What we need to do next is a family needs assessment."

Pelovsky and Baker are requesting that dialysis patients and their family members contact the MHA at (928) 472-2588 if they feel they need this type of medical service in Payson.

Upon completion of the family needs assessment, and presuming it is positive, the next step will be going after grants and fund-raising to renovate space, purchase equipment and ensure long-term sustainability.

Baker and Pelovsky believe the perfect place for a dialysis center is a large room now used for classes in the center of the RCHRC complex at 807 W. Longhorn Rd. They both look at the empty room and picture as many as 12 dialysis machines.

According to Baker, the overhead would be low.

If the community shows enough interest, then Baker and Pelovsky will make presentations to companies that already operate blood dialysis centers.

"I wouldn't say we can't open without that (help)," Pelovsky said, "but it is much more preferable to have a company whose business is blood dialysis and have the nephrologist on their staff."

He thinks the staff of technicians, nurse and receptionist could all be local hires.

When and if it opens, the dialysis center could be named for Don Holcombe, a local artist and radio personality who suffered from kidney failure and passed away in February. Holcombe and 11 other residents were left stranded when the area's only dialysis center, operated by Renal Care Group, closed its doors in January 2005.

At that time, one patient, Ed Johnson of Payson, wrote in a letter to the editor, "Isn't it about time Payson takes on the responsibility of seeing to it that its residents that call this town home, don't have to go all the way to hell and back just to have what most people take for granted?"

"Some people have moved to Phoenix and we (RCHRC) have turned down seven residents last year for lack of dialysis," Pelovsky said.

If all goes well, the needs assessments, grant process and construction for the new center could be complete within a year, Baker said.

"Isn't it scary enough knowing that your kidneys are failing and that it could kill you?" Johnson wrote. "Maybe you've never considered the possibility that it could happen to you. Well I'm here to tell you right now, don't bet on it."