



The Birth of Renal Support Network

by Lori Hartwell, weKAN President



I can remember the exact moment I came up with the idea of starting the Renal Support Network. I was in my car, waiting for a red light

on Sunset Blvd. in Hollywood, by the Kodak Theater, where the Academy Awards take place.

The gridlock was horrible that day, but when you are stuck in Los Angeles traffic you have lots of time to think. (Cell phones were not yet

mainstream!) It was the two-year anniversary of my kidney transplant; I was so grateful to not have to dialyze anymore. I had been on dialysis for 12 years and this was such a welcome change.

I suddenly found myself wanting to help fellow patients connect with their peers—to have the opportunity to share their experiences, strengths, and hopes with one another. After all, one friend *can* make the difference! Thus was born the idea of the Renal Support Network, on April 28, 1992.

When I got home I started writing a letter requesting support for my very first project, the Renal Support Network Directory, which lists the names and phone numbers of kidney patients who wish to talk with other patients. The Directory, which largely serves the Southern California region, continues to grow in scope.

Time flies by so fast! It's hard to believe that RSN just wrapped up its 7th Annual Renal Teen Prom, a star-studded event that saw young renal patients traveling from as far as Arizona, Washington State, and New Jersey to attend. We're in the process of producing our 9th RSN Directory, and we've grown to now boast a dedicated base of volunteers located across the country. This October we will be hosting our 3rd Annual National Patient Meeting—"Health, Happiness & Hope"—in Philadelphia.

RSN's weKAN (Wellness & Education Kidney Advocacy Network) program has taken root. We have dedicated weKAN "patient activists" in more than 20 states working to help fellow patients attain the best care possible, and we now have this awesome newsletter that you're reading. Our latest program, PEPP (Patients Educating Patients & Professionals), comprises a series of educational programs to be led by patient-speakers from across the country.

We've accomplished a lot in a

March is Kidney Month

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Even if your friends or loved ones answer "no" to the above questions, you might want to pass along the list of problems commonly associated with kidney disease (on page 1); it just might encourage them to get tested.

Free Testing!

Free health screenings for kidney disease are available through the National Kidney Foundation's "Kidney Early Evaluation Program" (KEEP) and through the American Kidney Fund's "Minority Intervention and Kidney Education" (MIKE) program. To find out more, contact:

National Kidney Foundation

(800) 622-9010

www.KEEPonline.org

American Kidney Fund

(800) 638-8299

www.kidneyfund.org 



Virna Elly, from Northern Virginia, lives a full and meaningful life despite the challenges of coping with numerous chronic illnesses. In August 2005 she received a successful kidney-pancreas transplant. Virna currently works as a patient advocate, author, patient educator, and speaker on kidney, diabetes, and organ transplantation & donation issues.

relatively short time, and we've seen tangible proof along the way of the importance of patients reaching out to support their peers. Kidney disease is simply too demanding when you don't have hope!

If someday you have an idea to help make your community a better place, write it down and act upon it. Many famous people will be receiving the coveted Oscar this year, but nothing matches the feeling of being able to use your own life experience to help others. If you have an idea to help your community, nurture it and let it grow. There's no telling where it might take you. 

Chronically Yours,

Lori Hartwell

President and Founder of Renal Support Network

weKAN Live & Give is a publication of the Renal Support Network, a patient-run nonprofit organization whose mission is to identify and meet the non-medical needs of those affected by chronic kidney disease.

weKAN Patient Activists serve to mobilize, educate, motivate, and empower fellow chronic kidney disease survivors to advocate for themselves and for one another. Together we can make a difference.

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