



Personal Maintenance Agreement

by Lori Hartwell, RSN President



Recently I was exiting a long flight when I overheard a woman say to her spouse, "I have to go the restroom, my kidneys are killing me!" We all know that her *bladder* was killing her—figuratively speaking.

In today's high-tech healthcare society, I am amazed at how little people know about their bodies and what makes them tick.

Limited awareness leaves people

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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prone to developing serious health problems. The two leading causes of kidney disease are diabetes and high blood pressure. It is estimated that 20 million Americans have chronic kidney disease, which equates to 1 in 9 adults. There are so many people who have no idea that their bodies are in crisis.

During my 38 years of living with chronic kidney disease, I have tried to learn all that I possibly can about kidney disease and my overall well-being. It is important to learn about dialysis adequacy, your medications, vascular access, preventing infection, exercise, transplantation, understanding your lab values... etc. I've read everything I could find, I've asked questions, and I've put all that I learned into practice.

Today's renal care professionals are in a time crunch. In order to provide optimal care, the renal care team must: meet with each patient, monitor the patient, complete a patient assessment, administer medication, answer questions, and educate the patient on his or her particular condition or care plan. These duties become easier to handle when patients do their part to learn more about how their body functions.

Unfortunately, people are often unaware that their bodies are malfunctioning until the problem has progressed. It's sort of like owning a computer: Most people (including myself) do not become interested in how the computer works until it crashes. When this happens, we lug our computer off to the shop where the computer technician

tells us our computer's diagnosis in "mumbo-jumbo" computer language. But we don't care why the computer crashed, we just want it fixed. Right? If we would just read the manual and pick up on a few maintenance tips, we could keep our computers on our desks where they are productive.

In this respect, computers are like the human body.

We need to know how the human body works in order to prevent serious damage and costly repairs. If we see our doctor regularly,

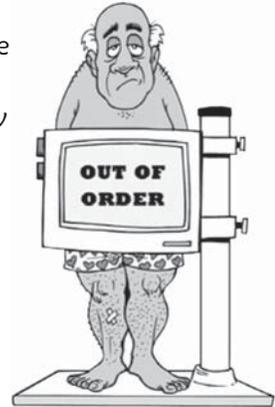
educate ourselves about how our body works, and pay attention to warning signs, we may be able to prevent a hospital stay and decrease our need for a healthcare professional's time. If we take steps to maintain our health, we can take some of the pressure off the overburdened healthcare system.

I'm still learning! I owe a great deal of my well-being to the knowledge that I obtained early on. I encourage others to learn as much as they can about their own health so they too can live productive lives. Educating yourself about chronic kidney disease and how your body works could prove to be a priceless endeavor.

Chronically Yours,

Lori Hartwell

President & Founder of Renal Support Network



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