



Employment and PD: A Perfect Relationship

Like many women, 43-year old Connie manages to balance a full-time career with being a full-time wife and mother. However, Connie also manages to fit in daily peritoneal dialysis (PD) treatments. “PD is the way to go if you want to be working and involved in life,” she says. “Life doesn’t stop because you have kidney failure.”

Connie has had Type 1 diabetes since she was 12, and learned she had chronic kidney disease in 2000. At the time, Connie was an employee of the City of Shreveport, and told her boss about the disease. “He called me into his office and asked if I was okay and if I needed anything,” she recalls. “He even asked if I needed a less stressful position. I said ‘no’ since I wasn’t on dialysis yet.”

A few months later, a Legal Administrator job opened up. “This was a job I had wanted since I started working for the City 20 years ago!” says Connie. “So I applied.”

Connie’s new boss was aware that she had a kidney disease, but also knew that she was the best person for the job. “Once I was hired, he told me that he knew about my kidney problems because a reference of mine told him!” Connie remembers. She has been working in this position ever since.

Choosing PD

When Connie’s kidneys failed in the fall of 2001, her doctor mentioned PD as a treatment option that would be a good choice for her. Connie decided to try PD



because it let her keep working and help care for her family. “If I had to go to a unit to do hemodialysis for 4 hours every other day, and keep working 40 hours a week, my desk would be piled up with work!” says Connie. “PD and work go well together. I feel fine after doing my exchange.”

“PD is closer to what I want out of life,” she explains. “I have two active sons, ages 12 and 16, as well as a husband who works full-time and can’t do everything by himself.”

Connie has never stopped working an 8 to 5, 40-hour work week. She did go to her local Social Security office to find out about disability programs. “I didn’t want to stop working,” she says. “I just wanted to find out what it was all about if I ever did need it.”

Exchanges

Connie is on the PD cycler every day from 9:00 p.m. until 6:00 a.m. In the past, she did her mid-day exchange at work during lunchtime. “I would tell my boss and other employees that when the door is closed I cannot have visitors for sanitary reasons,” she says. “Then I had 30 minutes of privacy to do my exchange.”

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In time, carrying in all of the supplies to work grew tiring, and Connie now does her mid-day exchange when she comes home from work at 5:30 p.m. In fact, Connie finds that it's a nice break. "I like being at home in my bedroom with the door closed for a half hour," she says. "It's my time to unwind after work." On weekends, Connie does her mid-day exchange earlier to spread out her treatment times.

Living Life

Like many people on dialysis, Connie does have bad days. "Some days I find myself

thinking about my kidney failure, too," relays Connie. "But if you have any condition that requires you to do something to feel better, it will be inconvenient at times."

Working has been key to helping Connie keep a positive attitude. "When I'm at work, I talk to people and listen to their problems, and it helps take the emphasis off of my problems," she says. "If I wasn't working, I'd be one depressed sister! Working keeps my life as normal as it can be given that I have kidney failure."

Working Is Good for You!

If you are already working, great! Research has shown that people who have kidney disease and work have higher self-esteem and live longer than those who don't. Health insurance, money, and staying involved are just some of the reasons people choose to keep working.

If you are not working right now, but would like to get a job, call a vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselor to talk about your work goals and the options open to you. To find your local state VR agency, visit www.socialsecurity.gov/work/ServiceProviders/rehabproviders.html, or call (800) 772-1213 (TTY 800-325-0778).

Temporary ("temp") job agencies are a good way to "get your feet wet" and give you the experience you need to find a permanent job. Kelly Services, Olsten Staffing Services, and Manpower are all known for hiring people with disabilities like end-stage renal disease. Check

the yellow pages section in your phone book for your local agency's number.

Other website resources that may be able to help you include:

- *Employment: A Kidney Patient's Guide to Working & Paying for Treatment* at www.lifeoptions.org
- The National Center on Workforce and Disability for Adults at www.onestops.info
- The Office of Disability Employment Policy at www.dol.gov/odep/
- The Social Security Office of Employment Support Programs at www.socialsecurity.gov/work

Can't work full-time? There are many things you can do to keep busy and give back to your family and community. Finding a part-time job, volunteering, going to school, or even doing household tasks are all ways that you can help keep a positive attitude and stay involved in life.

Baxter

www.kidneydirections.com