

Reaching the
Gold Standard ...

Fistula Journeys



My Fistula and Me

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My fistula is the most important part of me. I clean my blood every day via this access to sustain my life. I take good care of the fistula and it helps to keep my life normal. I can describe the relationship between my fistula and me as good working partners.

I started dialysis in 1982. During the past twenty-eight years, I had two kidney transplants that both failed immediately. Therefore I never came off dialysis. The first eight years of my dialysis journey were on PD. With time, the peritoneum started to fail, and I had to switch to hemodialysis. The need for switching was sudden, therefore I didn't have time to wait for the fistula in my arm to mature. That process usually takes two to three months.

A temporary catheter was placed in my

chest for hemodialysis access. It was in the summer and I was told not to take showers to prevent infection which more or less ruined all the summer fun since I had to stay inside to avoid sweat. I often wondered why anyone would choose to have a catheter long-term for dialysis. However, despite following the recommendations faithfully, the catheter site became infected, and the catheter just fell out on its own one day. I had to start to use the immature fistula.

The first few weeks on hemodialysis were not a pleasant experience. It was very difficult to access the fistula. I wished that the fistula was created a few months earlier so it would have been ready when I needed it. After two months of in-center dialysis, my fistula was fully-developed, and I learned how to access it myself. I switched from in-

center dialysis to home hemodialysis. I have been on home hemodialysis for twenty years now, and I am still using the original fistula placed twenty years ago.

It has almost



(Pictured above: Dadi Ding and Tienyun Yang)

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been problem-free for the entire twenty years. It has never been clotted or infected. I can run 400ml/min blood flow on it to achieve good clearance. This has saved me from frequently returning to the operating room for revision, or recreating a new access, in addition to interruption of treatments, work, and every day life. These things usually happen when a temporary catheter or graft is placed for dialysis.

I have been protecting my fistula just like protecting my eyes, because I know that without the eyes I would live in darkness, and without the fistula I would not be able to survive at all. I have been following all the recommendations provided by the dialysis center including no restrictive clothing or anything that may interfere with blood flow to the arm with the fistula, assessing the bruit daily to ensure the patency, cleaning it following the unit protocol before cannulating to prevent infection, and avoiding injury to the fistula arm. When I am out of town for vacations or conferences, I dialyze in a dialysis unit.



The Patient Leadership Committee, guiding The Renal Network, Inc. education efforts, wanted to support the Fistula First Breakthrough Initiative through the words and experiences of other patients.

I always cannulate myself since I believe that I know my fistula the best. I dialyze daily, and the frequent needle puncture can cause trauma to the fistula wall. Five years ago, I started to use the buttonhole technique to access the fistula. This method of cannulating is believed to reduce the insult to the tissue and prolong the life of the fistula.

My fistula is a line that my life depends on. I am glad my doctor helped me to choose the best dialysis access among all the ones available at that time. Through this life-line, I have been able to live this long and live a close-to-normal life. I hope all the dialysis patients who have not been using fistulas will consider getting one.

We all need to conserve our major vessels for any emergency.

The longevity of a fistula can minimize the number of surgeries and insults to vessels.

Vascular Access is a Hemodialysis Patient's Lifeline.

Five reasons to consider an A-V Fistula:

1. Fewer infections
2. Fewer hospitalizations
3. Fewer problems with clotting
4. Better blood flow for better treatment
5. Usually lasts years, compared to weeks or months for other access types

Discuss with your doctor and healthcare team your preference for an A-V Fistula.