

Fistula Journeys



What Choice Do I Make?

By Jim Dineen, member of The Renal Network Patient Leadership Committee and Medical Review Board

It's hard for me to remember that fateful day. A lot had been going on in my life and for someone to ask me a question like that just seemed more than I needed at the time. He told me to go home and think about it but not for too long. After all he said "You don't have too long." I hate it when decisions must be made quickly. It takes away that great opportunity to do what I love to do best - procrastinate. But here I am doing it again with this article so I'll get to the point. My doctor had just asked me if I wanted a fistula or a graft. Now what was I going to do?

I really should explain briefly that the time I had leading up to this question had been rather long, almost two full years and I had been through an awful lot to get to this point. In addition to a number of health problems, I'd already lost my business, my cars and my livelihood and now I was supposed to make a decision on whether to tie my own veins and arteries together or use a plastic tube to stay alive. Plastic seemed to be the easy way forward until I started asking questions. My decision would be critical to my survival.

I've always been a pretty decisive person but the years leading up to my dialysis had made

me question almost every belief about every little thing I'd ever thought. Fistula or graft had become for me a monumental decision that was tearing me apart and I was sick of being torn apart so I started to do some research. I won't go into all the technical jargon I ran into nor will I comment on the many opinions I found on what was good for me, real or plastic. What I can say is that my desire to get through what seemed to be the biggest decision I would ever make drove me to get a clear understanding of the positives and negatives of my decision. My kidneys were going fast, I was feeling worse every day and a decision had to be made.

My ultimate decision was actually based on my firm belief that real and natural is always better than fake and manufactured. My direction was based on discussions with my nurses, my doctors. and much research on my computer.

My decision was fast, within a couple of days and critical.

I needed this done within one week.



Pictured above: Jim Dineen

My Fistula and Me

Procrastination was out of the question.

I am today almost seven years into my transplant and I feel fantastic. I exercise every day, eat right and take very good care of myself. I look back and know that my decision to go with a fistula was probably the best decision I ever made and here is why.

- In the three years I was on hemodialysis, two in a clinic and one at home, I had zero problems with my fistula..
- I had no clotting during my dialysis years, unlike many of my fellow patients.
- I actually lived a pretty normal life with my fistula, able to take showers, exercise and have very effective dialysis treatments three times a week. This was actually every other night when I did home hemodialysis.
- I began to regain my strength both physically and mentally. I had actually made a decision regarding my own care and with the help and guidance of my medical team had received a new lease on



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.

life. My test results showed that I was improving to the point where I could do things I feared I'd never experience again. My fistula was my friend and I took care of it accordingly.

Now, you may be saying to yourself that your situation is different than mine and I believe that all of us are unique in our lives. I don't think I've met two kidney patients that are exactly alike and I try to never say "I know just how you feel" because I don't. But I understand, to the best of my ability, the thought process that each of us must deal with when deciding whether to have a graft or a fistula. For me, there has never been a regret and I feel strongly that my fistula was my lifeline to a new me. "Fistula first" isn't just a saying but a challenge that has paid big dividends for both me and my family. When that day comes that a decision must be made, research all options. Natural and real has been the perfect choice for me.

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.