

LIFE OF ADAPTATION AND CELEBRATION

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FROM CRITICAL CARE NURSE TO NEPHROLOGY NURSE

Nursing has always been my passion in life. Since starting as a first year nurse in 1970, I knew that this was my calling. I soon realised that the high tech area of nursing would be my final destination. As a Critical Care Nurse I used to say “the more machines and pipes, the better I feel”. I also came into contact with the reality of patients with brain stem death, and used to be very unsympathetic towards transplant coordinators who had to manage these patients for transplantation. We use to call them “vultures” when they visit our unit.

The more I came into contact with patients with renal failure, the more I realised that this would be my choice of speciality. When I became the nurse in charge of a haemodialysis unit, I had a very different attitude towards Transplant Coordinators. Now we were partners and I also became a “vulture”. Now organ donation and transplantation became the most important means of saving chronic renal failure patients’ lives.

FROM NURSE TO PATIENT

Becoming part of nursing education, I soon established the programmes in the Certificate and later on Diploma in Nephrology Nursing at the then Rand Afrikaans University and University of Port Elizabeth.

I used to lecture to the students on all the aspects of chronic kidney disease and renal replacement therapy and used to tell them “this is how patients feel and how they should adapt to their illness”.

Transplant Coordinators and the Organ Donor Foundation became part of the lecturing team and together we were speakers at the same Nephrology congresses.

During 1994 I contracted Wegener’s Disease (systemic vasculitis) that destroyed my sinuses, affected my lungs and caused me to go into renal failure and soon I had to go onto peritoneal dialysis. During this time I stood on the promise the Lord gave me in Isaiah 41:10: ***So do not fear. I am with you. Do not be dismayed for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.***

Here I was, knowing all about dialysis, and had to dialyse myself at night on automated peritoneal dialysis. Soon I realised the reality of having a machine in the bedroom and the effect that diet, emotional turmoil and restrictions have on the family. For the first time I could tell the students exactly how a patient feels!



FROM DIALYSIS TO TRANSPLANTATION

Transplantation is for most of the patients on dialysis, the ultimate destination to renewed life. For the first time you realise the importance of organ donation and you yourself becomes a spokes person for the work of the **Organ Donor Foundation**. I would like to pay tribute to these

wonderful committed persons of ODF who made it their life-goal to help others with the gift of life.

We always say “when the call comes...” but we don’t realise what it means. I felt like a pregnant woman who was going into labour and did not have my suitcase ready for the trip. When the call came at 08:40 on Saturday 13th March 2004, I was told to be in Cape Town by 13:00. We stay in Cape St. Francis and it was impossible to get there in time. Fortunately Roy Liebenberg (friend) has a small plane and by closing my eyes and pray, we managed to get to Cape Town by 12:30. And as they say in the classics – the rest is history!



Transplantation is not only a physical experience, but a truly emotional eye-opener. A few days following the transplant, I realised the following:

- I had been on dialysis for 3 years, 3 months and 3 days;
- The call came on the 13th of March (3rd month of the year);
- I was scheduled for theatre at 3 o'clock
- I was discharged on 23rd March.

I wondered what all these “3’s” could mean until a friend of mine told me to read Jeremiah 33:3 – ***“Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know”***

Here I was, a qualified dialysis and transplant nurse who thought I knew everything about Nephrology Nursing, and for the first time realised that I knew nothing of the real experience. There after I could truly tell the students exactly how patients experience transplantation.

CELEBRATION OF NEW LIFE

Teaching students and being part of promoting organ donation and transplantation stayed a very important part of my life – but I felt that I had to celebrate this new life with more passion. I joined the then Transplant Games Association of South Africa (later became the South African Transplant Sports Association – SATSA) and qualified to participate in the 2005 World Transplant Games (WTG) in Canada. What an experience! To be part of 1500 transplantees from all over the world competing in good spirit and celebrating life, was overwhelming.



Heilie & Willie Uys

Since then I have participated in six World Transplant Games and was blessed to have won 25 medals in total. I thank the Lord for the strength, good health and opportunity to give thanks in such a way to the donor and family who made a commitment to become organ donors. Thanks also to my husband, Willie, for his support and encouragement over the years.

Heilie Uys
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