

Profiles in Kidney Care – December 2007

Independent hemodialysis in Northern Health

Dialysis patients who live in BC's Northern Health region are benefiting from two programs aimed at maximizing independence: one supports patients to dialyze at home regardless of where they live, and the other, for people who live in or near Prince George, supports patient involvement in dialysis unit-based treatment.

"Northern Health is a natural for an independent hemodialysis program because communities are so dispersed and travelling to a dialysis unit can be very time consuming," says Angela Robinson, home hemodialysis educator for the Northern Health renal program.



Currently, ten patients do their own dialysis at home across the region, and another patient is in training in Prince George, where the Northern Health renal team is based.

Home hemodialysis may not be for the very sickest of renal patients, but it's surprising how many people can do it – and can benefit.

"Admittedly, the training itself is quite a commitment because of the time involved and the amount of information to take in," says Angela, who has worked with the provincial

independent dialysis program since it began in 2004, and in renal care since becoming a nurse in 1992. "On the other hand, the quality of life on home hemodialysis is much better, not only because people don't have to travel, but also because they can dialyze more often and for longer, which makes for better outcomes."

The second program, for patients who live near Prince George, is "self-limited care," which takes place in a hospital or dialysis unit but which involves patients in as many aspects of care as possible. "Some people may not be completely comfortable with everything, for instance inserting needles, but participation at any level can be very empowering," says Angie, who also provides training for self-care patients. "Our self-limited care patients would never go back to regular dialysis – they are taking it on 100 percent."

The Northern Health self-limited care clinic is moving from Prince George Regional Hospital to a new location offsite early in 2008, says Angie. "We will be in a space that is less clinical and more comfortable," she says. "Being away from the hospital



environment should encourage even more independence.”

The program is currently at capacity with eight patients. “We’re really pleased about the new location because we’ve got very little space in the hospital and we only operate three days a week,” says Angela, whose passion for nephrology developed on a personal note: her grandmother had polycystic kidneys and was the first patient in Prince George on hemodialysis. “The new unit will allow us to accept more patients into the program, and eventually, we hope to offer more flexibility with our operating hours.”