

Profiles in Kidney Care – February 2008

Hilda Gregory is determined not to let kidney disease slow her down

Hilda Gregory knew at age 15 what she wanted to do with her life. The former school principal and recipient of the Order of British Columbia, the Order of Canada and a YWCA Women of Distinction award – who also happens to be on peritoneal dialysis – saw a film about a deaf child whose mother was determined to teach her to speak.

“I knew right away that’s what I wanted to do,” says the 71-year-old Vancouver resident. She became a teacher and taught hearing children for three years before taking specialized training in Manchester, England. Following her training, she taught deaf children in Liverpool for two years and then moved to Vancouver, where she started the Vancouver Oral Centre for Deaf Children in 1963.

“I heard about a group of parents with deaf children – and no preschool to go to,” says Hilda. “I started working with their eight three-year-olds, and that was beginning of the school.”



PD patient, Hilda Gregory, receiving care at Vancouver General Hospital.

In 1997, Hilda’s kidneys failed and she found herself at UBC hospital in critical condition. “When I think back, I had been feeling tired and unwell for a while, but I put it down to being busy fundraising for a new school building,” she says. “The campaign wrapped up successfully, we completed the design, got the permits – and that’s when I became seriously ill.”

Hilda was determined not to let “seriously ill” get her down for long. She was transferred from UBC Hospital to Vancouver General for hemodialysis, and when approached by a nurse about dialysis options, requested the one that would “let her get on with her life.” For Hilda, that option was peritoneal dialysis, which allowed her to return to work a few months later, complete the school’s move to the new building, and celebrate its 35th anniversary before she retired.

In 2001, Hilda had a kidney transplant. The new kidney served her for just over five years, and as of summer 2006 she has been back on peritoneal dialysis, through the Vancouver Coastal Renal Program. Despite all the ups and downs, Hilda has no regrets at all.

“I feel so normal!” she says. “I do everything I want to do, and I have lots of energy.” Since she retired, a lot of that energy has been spent advocating for, building and managing social housing in downtown Vancouver through the 127 Society for Housing, an organization she helped form in 1981. Hilda provides peer support to other kidney patients, and is also on several committees – for the Vancouver Oral Centre, the Christ Church Cathedral, and Vancouver General Hospital, as well as the Kidney Foundation, where she is also a board member and secretary to the executive committee.

“Kidney disease hasn’t slowed me down at all,” laughs Hilda. “I do my treatments at home or at meetings – whatever it takes to make them fit in my life.”