

Staff photos by Stephen Cantrell



Diane Kauffman, head nurse in the hemodialysis center, makes sure everything is running as it should.

Their way of survival.

By Doug Funke
staff writer

Courage is never in short supply in the field of medicine. Barney Clark lived — endured — nearly 112 days with an artificial heart connected to a power source outside his body. Perhaps just as courageous are the 70 men and women who undergo hemodialysis treatment on a regular basis at the Henry Ford Hospital-Troy Center.

Hemodialysis is a process by which waste materials in the blood are filtered artificially because the kidneys have failed. Treatment is generally scheduled three times per week 3½-4 hours per session, 52 weeks a year.

Hemodialysis patients usually aren't written up in medical journals, but the time spent hooked up to machines is just as much a matter of life or death for them as it was for Clark.

They, too, struggle to endure — and live. Jim Hall, 37, of Warren has been on a dialysis machine for 3½ years. A diabetic since a young child, Hall has already received a kidney transplant, but it failed to take.

"The dialysis treatment isn't painful, more like physically draining," Hall said. "The biggest problem is keeping the blood pressure up," he added.

"RIGHT ABOUT the time he feels good and gets his strength up, he has to come back," said Jim's wife, Donna. "Out of 24 hours, he sleeps a good 18-19 hours a day. He's just exhausted."

Hall balances a small portable radio on his chest and holds a small wooden contraption as he lays back in a recliner.

"It's a backcracker," Hall said. "That's worth \$100. These vinyl chairs get hot, and you have to have something to get to your back with."

Hall worked as a draftsman until about a 1½ years ago when he developed cataracts.

Donna Hall drives her husband to his treatments. She went

to nursing school after he developed kidney problems and now sets up and monitors his dialysis treatment.

"I sit back and look at Jim. He has so much faith, so much courage," she said. "How he comes here and faces this . . ."

"I have a real strong belief in God," Hall said. "That's what brings me here. I believe He can heal me today as He did when He was on earth. 'I have hope and that's what keeps me going.'"

However, there are discouraging moments. "You're in a rut. It's the same thing every week," Hall said.

He really isn't anxious to try another transplant, he said.

WILLIAM STAHL, 79, of Southfield led a normal life until seven months ago, when both kidneys were found to be cancerous.

"It's a debilitating experience," Stahl said. "Psychologically, it killed me when I found out."

The only painful part of the treatment is when the needles are inserted, Stahl said.

"It's confining, and robs you of your energy. I go home and go to bed and sleep three-four hours. (Treatment) days are basically shot."

Stahl, like most dialysis patients, takes many kinds of medication. He must watch his diet and intake of liquids.

"It's a son-of-a-gun when you're told you can't have something. That's when you want it."

Stahl just sits and thinks most of his time while taking treatment, he said. "You can't seem to concentrate. Mostly, what you do is think, 'Is it worth it?' But you're alive."

"This is my savior. You're beholden to a machine. It's not good physically or psychologically. But you have no choice."

"One consolation is hope for the future. Science may come up with something a little different or a little more compatible."

Stahl, formerly in the real estate business, still tries to keep

active in the Masonic lodge he helped found.

It isn't always easy. "You're robbed of all your incentives."

TED THORNTON, 49, of Detroit has been undergoing dialysis for four years — one year before an unsuccessful kidney transplant, three years since.

Thornton, whose kidney problems stem from high blood pressure, is on medical retirement from the automotive industry.

"I look at life as fate. It happens," he said. "I ask myself sometimes, 'God, why did this happen?' It's part of life. I say to myself some things just hit people."

"You have your weak and your strong, your sick and your well. Everything in life has its opposite."

Thornton varies his routine while taking dialysis. Sometimes, he'll read, other times, chat with a fellow patient and still other times, sleep.

Thornton, anxious to try another transplant, is on a waiting list for a donor.

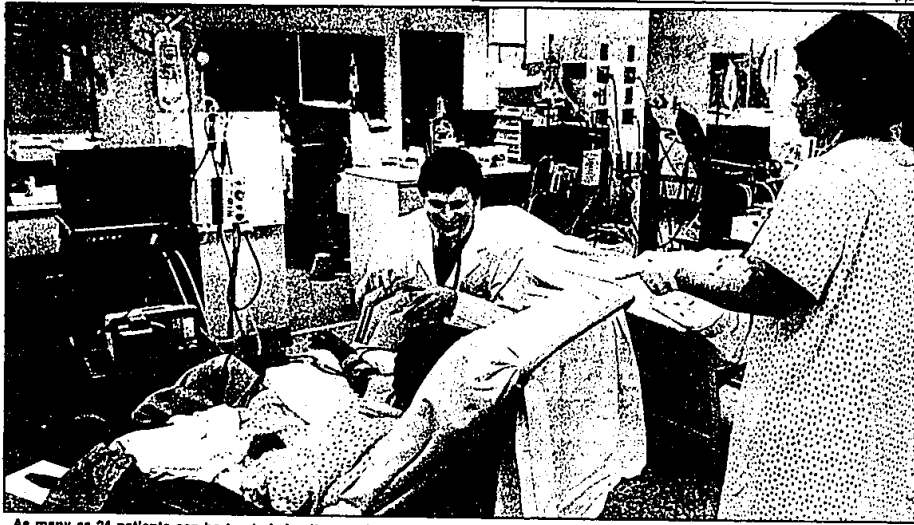
"I miss being able to do the physical activity I used to do. One thing about kidney disease — it drains you."

"I say as long as I have my sight, I can cope with anything else that comes along. I'm not an easy person to give up."

"I never get angry about it. I'm in pretty good shape compared to some people in this world."

EVEN WITH hemodialysis, the life of a patient is extended by an average of only 7-10 years, said Diane Kauffman, head nurse at the Troy Center.

She has always been attracted to working with chronically ill patients.



As many as 24 patients can be treated simultaneously on dialysis equipment at Henry Ford Hospital-Troy Center.



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Dr. Kevin Krane listens to the concerns of a patient.



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Some people just cover up and escape from it all during treatment, which lasts 3½-4 hours at a time.