

## CHAPTER FOUR

### What Type of Help is Out There?

Thankfully, there are a lot of options we can look into if we decide we need help in dealing with the emotional demands of dialysis. Unfortunately, there is no one answer that works for everyone. Several of us have found that a combination of types seems to work best. And even when we find a combination that works, it is likely to change over time and we start looking for a new combination. But peace of mind and a feeling of hope are worth the effort, so we keep fighting for it.

#### ASK QUESTIONS

The more we understand what is happening and what to expect in the future, the more we can let go of the fear. We need to ask our medical team to explain these things in a way that we can understand. We cannot be too shy to ask them to explain things over and over until we understand. We can also ask other patients how they deal with certain situations. They can share their experiences and hope. Often this can be very comforting.

*We must be sure to check our facts with our medical team.*

For those of us who learn by reading, there is a lot of print material available through our units and on the internet. But we must be careful. Not everything that we hear from other patients or read on the internet is accurate.

#### PEER MENTORING

A peer mentor is a patient who is willing to share his or her experience with other patients. Many units have formal Peer Mentoring programs where the social worker will pair up an experienced patient with a patient who is having trouble adjusting. They can listen and share their experiences. Peer mentors do not give medical advice, but they can help us decide what

*They can help decrease our feelings of isolation and help relieve our fears.*

questions we need to ask our medical team. They also help us to better manage our health.

Some units offer Peer Mentoring. Some units do not. Sometimes we can work with a Peer Mentor from a neighboring unit. Several kidney related organizations offer Peer Mentoring through e-mails and through phone calls.

## SUPPORT GROUPS

Support groups can be very helpful in decreasing feelings of isolation and relieving fears. There is something comforting in knowing that the people around us have the same fears and experiences. It is sometimes easier to adjust to living with kidney disease if we do it together.

*Members usually share their experiences and offer one another emotional comfort and moral support.*

Many units have support groups. They may also be available in other units in the area. Or we may need to consider a support group for other forms of chronic illness (like cancer). Some of the experiences may be different, but many of the fears are the same. You should also consider many online forums and social media groups which exist specifically for people dealing with ESRD.

## PERSONAL GOAL SETTING

Sometimes something as simple as having a goal is enough to get us dressed in the morning. These can be one-year goals, one-day goals, or just the next breath. They should be meaningful for us and achievable. Once we have set a goal, we can develop a plan to reach it. Our goals can be changed at any time and new goals can be set.

*They can be as simple as "I want to visit my grandchildren" to "I want to get registered for a transplant".*

## PLAY

Do something fun. If nothing seems fun anymore, keep trying anyway. That's just a symptom of depression. We should plan things we used to enjoy and adapt them to our new limitations. We can also try new things. If some of

our hobbies are more energetic than we can now manage, we can look for new things that are less demanding. Kids play all the time. We should too.

## MEDITATION

Just breathe. Take time to be still and concentrate on breathing. There is a form of meditation called Mindfulness that helps us slow down the chatter in our brains and just breathe. It helps us to stop replaying old conversations over and over again. It helps us stop inventing conversations that haven't even happened yet. There are several free apps available for phones and iPads that can help us learn how to calm down and breathe.

## RELIGION/SPIRITUALITY

Many of us hold on to or turn to our faith. Pastoral counseling can help to ease our fears and restore our peace of mind.

There are several ways to turn to Faith, Religion and Spirituality.

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### SEEK OUT A QUALIFIED PASTOR OR FAITH COUNSELOR

Talking to a faith-based professional may help us get a better perspective on our depression or anxiety.

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### GET INVOLVED IN WORSHIP SERVICES

By attending worship services, we may find a support group to help with overcoming depression and anxiety.

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### SPIRITUALITY CLASSES

Seeing and hearing what scripture has to say on certain topics may help us cope with the problems that we face from time to time.

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### SERVICE

Helping others may make us feel good and puts our focus on others' needs.

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### MUSIC

Inspirational music and other forms of music help lift our spirits. Listening to music throughout the day may do wonders.

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## PRAYER AND MEDITATION

Talking with your Creator or spiritual guide, and mediating on their words and teachings can provide comfort and strength.

## EXERCISE

Exercise can be a healthy coping strategy. It releases feel-good endorphins and can break the worry cycle. We can gain confidence by meeting small exercise goals and it may help us find healthy social interactions.

## 12 – STEP PROGRAMS

If there is a leaning toward self-medication or substance abuse, 12-step programs have a long history of success. While they may not work for everyone in every situation, many people have found solid coping skills through the 12 steps. Alcoholics Anonymous is the most easily recognized of the 12-step programs, but there are programs out there for a variety of compulsive behaviors ranging from food compulsions to gambling.

## PSYCHOTHERAPY

Psychotherapy is another name for talk therapy and there is a wide variety in the types of providers and styles that use psychotherapy. More is discussed in the following chapter (Chapter 5), but there is strong evidence that psychotherapy helps address most mental health issues. There is even growing evidence that it works well for patients with kidney disease.

## PHARMACEUTICAL OPTIONS

Any physician can prescribe medication designed to reduce depression or anxiety, but a psychiatrist is a specialist in this area. There are many medications that are relatively safe and have few side effects that can help and are considered safe to be used in patients with compromised renal function. You may want to start the conversation with your primary care doctor or nephrologist, or you can ask for a referral.