

Choosing to withdraw from dialysis

Introduction

Some people may decide to stop dialysis treatment. They may feel that dialysis is no longer helping their quality of life. If this does happen it is important to remember that anyone can make the decision to stop dialysis and they will still be cared for and supported by their healthcare team.

Often people find it difficult to talk about stopping treatment and are concerned about how others will feel and react. Some have worried people might view stopping dialysis as suicide. This is not the case and it is an acceptable decision when dialysis is not improving quality of life. They should try to discuss their feelings with their loved ones and staff can be present at these discussions if it's helpful.

If members of the healthcare team are concerned that the decision to stop dialysis is the result of a condition such as depression, they may ask the patient to speak with a psychiatrist or another counselling professional. Treatment of depression may mean some people change their mind about withdrawing from dialysis. Speaking with a counselling professional can help carers and staff understand why the decision is being made. They also help reassure everyone that the impact of stopping dialysis is fully understood.

Treatment once someone decides to withdraw from dialysis

If a patient decides not to have dialysis treatment they will still receive support and medical treatment from the hospital team. Their GP will also be aware of the decision. Everyone involved in a patient's care will support the decision, as long as they are happy that it is a fully informed choice.

Generally, dying from kidney failure is a gentle process and the majority of symptoms can be identified and well managed. Patients may live for up to two weeks or longer if they still have some kidney function remaining. Without dialysis treatment, fluid and toxins will build up in the body. This may make patients feel drowsy and breathless. The healthcare team will provide medicines to treat any problems.

End of life care

Patients and their carers can make choices about where they would like to die. Once a decision has been made, the healthcare team will do their best to comply with these wishes. Some may decide to stay in hospital until they die whilst others will choose to die at home in familiar surroundings, where they feel more comfortable. If this second option is chosen, the staff at the hospital will still help. A nursing home or hospice may be another option for some people.

Further information

For more information visit:

www.nhs.uk/planners/end-of-life-care/Pages/End-of-life-care.aspx

www.mariecurie.org.uk

