

# Taking Fear by its Horns

**People on dialysis have to manage very strong emotions. They worry if they will become dependent on others. Or they begin to dread the very treatment for their illness, dialysis. Henry Lew, senior psychologist, National Healthcare Group Polyclinics, shows you how to face the demons in your life.**

## Overcoming Fear of the Unknown

When Madam Salmah, aged 52, was first told that she had to go for dialysis, she could not believe it. After all, she had been following her doctor's instructions regarding medication, exercise and diet religiously. "I was disappointed that my efforts did not help," shares Mdm Salmah, "but, most of all, I was afraid. Day and night, I was worried that my health would go downhill and everything was going to end for me. I was fearful that my feet would rot and it had to be amputated. I had nightmares that I would go blind and suffer every kind of complication."

Lack of information and uncertainty play a major role in the fears that patients face. Many patients don't know what to expect--and they often fear the worst. As their health deteriorates and they lose their mobility and sense of freedom, they are confronted by sadness, anger, and intense fear. They wonder what the future holds for them.

Fortunately for Mdm Salmah, a nurse reached out to her. She says, "The nurse gave me a lot of information about dialysis. She told me that a lot of patients have been on dialysis for a long time and are all doing well. I had thought that dialysis was the end but the nurse reassured me that dialysis was to help me manage my health better."

## Overcoming Fear of Pain and Treatment

"Initially, I would turn back just as I reach the dialysis centre. The thought of those needles and the pain frightened me," says Mdm Salmah. "I would grow frustrated with myself and the whole process and

decide just not to proceed. Then I realised that it was not as bad as I thought it to be. Of course, there are still times I still dread going because of the discomfort, but once I get going, the feelings of fear will subside."

Often, the fear is replayed in our minds and gets blown out of proportion. Sometimes, it helps to take the fear by its horns. To overcome the inertia, it always helps to push your judgement aside and keep an open mind. Like Mdm Salmah, we might just find that what lies around the corner may not be so bad and difficult after all.

It is also common to feel that your family and friends do not really understand what it is like to have renal failure and undergo dialysis treatment. It is important to share your feelings and concerns with those close to you, while also realising that they may equally be affected by your illness and treatment. The quality of your relationships depends very much on good communication. Good communication will help you keep your negative emotions at bay.

## Manage your fear and negative emotions by:

- Seeking information from healthcare professionals
- Staying open-minded; the experience might just be manageable
- Talking to your healthcare professionals, employers and family members about how they can help you to cope with the changes in your life
- Exercising, and keeping active and employed, if possible

