

Dialysis machine substitutes for student's kidneys

by Robert A. Hibberd
Staff Writer

21-year-old Clackamas student Chris Wehling has been in and out of hospitals for the majority of his life.

Wehling was born with spina bifida, (a birth defect that affects the spinal cord) which is the reason that he has been in a wheelchair all his life.

"At the time I was born, 21 years ago, about 70 percent of people born with spina bifida did not live," Wehling said.

As for being in a wheelchair, Wehling says, "Sometimes people ask me, 'Don't you wish that you could walk?' I tell them, 'No, because I have been in a wheelchair all of my life and it would be just as hard for me to start walking after 21 years as it would be for you to get into a wheelchair after walking all of your life.'"

Two years ago, Wehling's kidneys ceased to function as an indirect result of his spina bifida birth defect.

Because of his kidney failure, Wehling now must go to a dialysis clinic three times a week for four hours in order to keep his system cleaned.

Wehling explains the dialysis procedure by saying, "They stick needles into my arm and the needles are hooked up to little tubes that go to a machine. The machine takes the blood and removes the junk that your kidneys would normally take care of, then dumps the junk down the drain."

Dialysis is a very expensive procedure that some patients have difficulty affording. CCC's Associated Student Government is currently raising money for dialysis

patients.

Wehling, however, is fortunate enough that he has insurance that covers his medical expenses.

Wehling says, "I get very good insurance. I get Medicare and Medicaid and I don't pay anything. It is actually pretty cool. They also pay for my wheelchair."

Wehling will have a kidney transplant someday but says that he is not mentally ready for the operation yet.

"I'm not ready, in my own mind, to get a kidney transplant yet because I would have to be very compliant with my diet and with my pills. I have to be really good at that stuff and I'm not yet. When I become good at that, then I will get a kidney transplant but until then I don't want to risk killing the kidney."

Kidney transplants require the patient to be disciplined in eating and pill-taking, otherwise the hard-to-find kidneys might fail after the transplant operation.

Wehling says, "I don't want to risk losing the kidney because it's not an easy process getting one. Tissue types have to match. Blood types have to match. The more things that are right the better the chance that you are going to have a kidney for a long time. Everybody that has a kidney transplant has to take a whole lot of drugs to keep their body from rejecting the foreign body part."

Once Wehling has had a successful kidney transplant he will be able to discontinue his dialysis.

"In some ways I'll actually miss dialysis because there is quite a bit of a social aspect involved. You just go into a room with a bunch of different people and kick

back in recliners and chat," says Wehling.

When asked if the dialysis procedure is painful, Wehling replied, "Well, the needles don't feel that great and sometimes you just feel like crap afterwards."

Wehling often encounters some strange reactions and behavior from people because he is in a wheelchair.

"Sometimes people are really worried about offending me," says Wehling. "If somebody looks like they are going to open a door for me, I'll go around them and I'll open the door for them. It really blows their mind. They just don't know what to think about it."

When asked if he is ever bothered by people's reaction, Wehling said, "The thing that really bothers me is when I'm in a shopping mall and there will be a little kid staring at me, and the fact that the kid is staring at me does not bother me because the kids just want to learn and know and that is great. The thing that bothers me is when the parents say, 'Don't stare. Don't stare.' Man, that bugs the crap out of me."

Wehling continues, "People don't realize that, 'Hey, he is in a wheelchair. How different can that make him. Well, not very.' It bugs me when people are curious and they don't ask me what is wrong."

"Something that I think is really neat is when a little kid is curious and they ask, 'Mommy, what is wrong with that man?' I love it when the parent says, 'Well, go ask.' I think that is one of the best things in the whole world. I think that makes for little kids that don't stare at handicapped people."



Photo by Nolan Kidwell

Twenty-one year old Clackamas student Chris Wehling visits a dialysis clinic 3 times a week for 4 hours. ASG is currently raising money for dialysis patients.

Wehling says, "That's the way I wish people could be. I am no different than anybody else. If somebody is curious about what is 'wrong' with me, then they should come and ask."

Despite being in a wheelchair and having many medical problems, Chris Wehling leads a very normal life and has several goals and aspirations.

"I want to be a psychologist-rock star-tattoo artist when I grow up," said Wehling who enjoys heavy metal music, drawing and has an ambition to become a psychologist.

"I want to give troubled teenagers somebody to talk to that is on their level," says Wehling when asked why he wants to become a psychologist. "I'm going to keep my hair long, I'm going to keep my earrings and I'm not going to wear

suits and stuff like that because I think that is why a lot of people are so nervous and can't open up. Basically I'm going to be one of them and I'm not going to be the psychologist, instead, I'm going to be their friend."

As for now, Wehling is enjoying school and looking forward to when he will be able drive his car.

Wehling says, "I have a permit and I'll be able to drive in six months. I am saving up for insurance on my car. My car is a 1974 Nova that is white with flames."

When asked if he has, or is actively seeking, female companionship, Wehling says, "I'm trying but all the girls I meet want to be my best friend. They wouldn't want to jeopardize our friendship. 'Come on, let's just live a little bit dangerously.'"

Pop can tabs buy life-saving time on expensive dialysis machine

by Daphne Hartt
Staff Writer

Harold Isackson, ASG senator to vice-president, recently started a project that can help many dialysis patients. In cooperation with local scrap-metal dealers, Isackson has set up a program in which soda can tabs are collected for patients with kidney problems.

As soon as a sufficient amount of aluminum tabs have been accumulated, the dealers will haul it back to their recycling center. Volunteers sort through the pieces of aluminum, putting them into the correct bin, and soon the aluminum is recycled and ready for use again.

For their contribution, the dealers offered to pay CCC more than the going rate, which is currently 30 cents per pound. The actual rate slightly fluctuates, but usually stays within the range of 20 to 45 cents per pound. According to Isackson, it takes about one thousand tabs to equal one pound. The collection basket, located in the ASG office, is already quite full.

Once the aluminum has been collected and Isackson receives the money, the funds are transferred to the Kidney Association of Oregon (KAO). These extra funds will help to provide services such as

transportation, hospital room expenses, and overall treatment of the patient. The KAO will distribute these donated funds to those with the greatest need.

Many patients have Medicare or some type of insurance, but most organizations only cover 80 percent of all medical costs. After a certain period of time, costs can be very strenuous on a family's budget. The operation of a dialysis machine, in itself, is very expensive. That alone could exhaust an average family's money.

Since this project is still fairly new, plans are presently being formulated to place collection containers at several locations on the campus. Soon, CCC will be collecting a wide variety of aluminum scrap metal. If students have any questions about the project, they may contact Isackson.

This donation will be of great service to many people. Isackson feels that in donating scrap metal, a person can "give service to others and get rid of unwanted junk at the same time."

He also comments, "Some people feel they cannot volunteer their services because they do not have time. This is an excellent way to help people without taking too much time out of a busy schedule."

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