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TOP STORY

La Grande woman seeks kidney donor

By Dick Mason The Observer
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Marcia Anderson of La Grande point to the place on her left arm where she has a medical device under her skin to connect her to a dialysis machine. Anderson's kidneys are failing and she is in need of a transplant. So far she has avoided the need for dialysis with healthy lifestyle habits.

Staff photo by Dick Mason

LA GRANDE — Marcia Anderson's suitcases always are packed.

They symbolize a sense of hope and urgency.

Anderson is suffering from stage-four kidney failure and is in need of a transplant. She has been on the National Kidney Registry's list for a transplant since earlier this year. Anderson never knows when a kidney from a deceased donor will become available for her, but when it does she knows she must act quickly.

"I will have just 11 hours to get to the hospital," said Anderson, referring to Legacy Good Samaritan Hospital in Portland, where her transplant operation would take place.

Anderson, 64, said if she misses the 11-hour deadline the transplant operation might not happen because the delay would limit the odds of success.

She will not face this deadline crunch, though, if she is fortunate enough to be able to receive a kidney from a living person who wants to donate one of his or her kidneys and is good match in terms of blood type, size and other factors.

"Kidney transplants from live donors are more successful," Anderson said.

The good-natured La Grande resident does not appear to have failing health. She walks 3 to 4 miles a day with ease and has the vibrant look of a younger person. Still, her doctors know better. They have told her she has failing kidneys due to diabetes.

"My kidneys are functioning at only 13%," Anderson said.

This means she is on the verge of needing to go on kidney dialysis. Evidence of how close she is to needing dialysis is in her lower left forearm. There is a hole in her skin for a fistula, a medical device under the skin that can be used to connect a person to a dialysis machine.

"My doctor put it in a year ago because he was sure I would need to go on dialysis soon," Anderson said.

Walking, having a healthy diet and drinking about three quarts of water a day have helped her avoid dialysis so far.

“Drinking water improves kidney function,” Anderson said.

Anderson qualified for the registry after passing an extensive health exam at the Legacy Transplant Services center at Legacy Good Samaritan Medical Center. It was the most thorough exam she has ever received.

“I was checked from head to toe,” Anderson said.

The doctors examining her determined that except for her kidneys she is in good health. Anderson said unlike many diabetics she does not have heart trouble or other issues. If she did she likely would not have been eligible for the National Kidney Registry.

Anderson was diagnosed with kidney failure two and a half years ago, a finding that surprised her.

“I went to the doctor for a sinus infection,” Anderson said. “Then they did some blood tests and said, ‘Did you know you have failing kidneys?’”

She had no symptoms common to people with kidney failure like swelling. The only symptom Anderson had was thirst.

Anderson and her husband, Larry, moved to La Grande almost a year ago to be near their daughter Heather Rajkovich. The couple moved to La Grande from Hermiston, where they had lived for 42 years.

In La Grande, Anderson has made many new friends and found plenty of places to walk, an activity long close to her heart. Noteworthy walks she has made earlier in her life include those made at marathons.

“I never ran, I walked,” Anderson said.

Anyone interested in finding out if they would qualify to be a donor for Anderson may call Legacy Good Samaritan Medical Center at 503-413-6555 and ask to speak to its transplant director or visit its website at legacyhealth.org.

Dick Mason

General assignment reporter

Beats include the communities of North Powder, Imbler, Island City and Union, education, Union County veterans programs and local history. Dick joined The Observer in 1983, first working as a sports and outdoors reporter.