



Are You Building Bridges or Walls?

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Hello, my name is Anita and I am a Facility Peer in Action volunteer and I will be highlighting the importance of the patient voice within your health plan. The aim of the Facility Peers in Action program is to provide patient-to-patient support, help establish bridges of communication between patients and staff, help patients become an active part of their health care success, as well as help facilitate the patient's needs in participation requirements.

Over my three years of dialysis, I have experienced peritoneal dialysis and hemodialysis and feel so blessed to be part of a clinical and medical group who truly cares for me. As a volunteer, it is my hope I can help other patients adjust to the transition of dialysis by being a good listener, provide encouragement and explaining how building bridges can create a positive experience.

I am in my 70's and my mother's words still echo through my head, "It's time to move on, Anita and put this behind you." Over the years her words have morphed into the quote, "*Are you building bridges or putting up walls?*" This quote has become the words I try to live by each day. Throughout our life we are faced with many challenges, obstacles, and problems and how we handle difficult situations defines our success. For my first article I wanted to share my philosophy for facing challenges in my life by, "building bridges not walls".

When I was informed I would need to go on dialysis 8 hours a days, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, I felt my life was over. In my despair my mother's words came back to me, "It's time to move on, Anita, and put this behind you." Was I going to build a bridge or put up walls? I realized I had two choices. I could have negative thoughts and feel sorry for myself, to build a wall, or I could build a bridge, face my challenges, and be a positive, active participant in my health care.

First and foremost, I needed to remember I was not alone!

Building bridges allows us the opportunity to create an atmosphere to work together by enriching, enabling, and empowering us. When challenges present themselves, we have two choices, 1) to build a bridge and travel over it, or 2) build a wall and create a barrier to our journey.

“Building walls” may impact our happiness and success by creating isolation, barriers, and distance, which can become obstacles to our success. When “building bridges” we eliminate obstacles, develop critical thinking skills for our problems, look to finding solutions, become open to solutions and provide a common meeting point.

Building bridges is a positive way of thinking. Research shows that positive thinking can aid in stress management and even play an important role in your overall health and well-being. Building a bridge will help combat feelings of low self-esteem, improve physical health, and help brighten your overall outlook on life.

When you're tempted to build a wall, consider building a bridge. It takes just as much work to build bridges as it does to build walls. Instead of shutting out or ignoring the challenges and obstacles, look for ways to be successful. Become an active partner in your health care. Become active in your health care by listening to your health team, reflecting on the health plan, discussing how you as a patient fit into the plan, and giving serious thought to how you are going to initiate the health plan. Step forward and “Build Bridges” to a positive and healthier you. “Building Bridges” prepares you to critically think through your challenges and be actively involved in the process.

“Let's build bridges not walls “

- Martin Luther King Jr

(from the 1963 “I Have a Dream” speech)

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