

My Treatment: My Dialysis Team

Good health care is always a team effort.

You and your family are important members of your care team. You should take an active role in your care by learning all you can and working with all members of your care team to develop your treatment plan (Plan of Care). Participating in patient care conferences is recommended so you get to talk about progress. The members of your care team each play a different role to give you quality care.



Nephrologist

Your nephrologist (kidney doctor) is the team leader in your care. Kidney doctors have advanced training in treating kidney disease. They are in charge of your dialysis care and may take care of you after a kidney transplant. And every clinic has a Medical Director, which is the kidney doctor that watches over clinic operations to make sure you get quality patient care.

Social Worker

Social workers working with kidney patients have a Masters degree in social work and must be licensed by the state. Your social worker will meet with you to talk about how you are doing with dialysis both at the center and at home. They give you supportive services and counseling to address the changes at home, at work, and in the community. Your social worker may identify your needs (in the clinic and at home) and provide you with different resources. These resources may include community and government programs that help with coping, financial, and homecare needs.

Advanced Practice Nurses, Nurse Practitioners, Physician Assistants

These clinicians have advanced nursing training in treating kidney disease. They work with your doctor to care for you at a medical office and in the clinic. They may visit you to review your medical record, make recommendations, and discuss your care with you.

Registered Nurse

Licensed Registered Nurse (RN) and Licensed Practical Nurses (LPN) work in the clinic and may have experience caring for kidney patients. Your nurse will:

- Assess your health status before, during, and after dialysis
- Check your home medications
- Give you medications during dialysis
- Make sure your doctor's orders are carried out (for example, dialysis prescription)
- Oversee the patient care technicians (PCTs)
- Make sure the machines are working correctly and water safety checks are done

All clinics must have a full-time RN experienced in dialysis that is responsible for nursing services in the clinic. Home program nurses train patients and their care partners for self-treatment. Some clinics may have a nurse assigned to you as your “primary” nurse.

Dietician

Dietitians have specialized degrees in dietetics and must meet certain education requirements to be registered dietitians (RDs). They know what foods are right for people on dialysis and about other medical conditions, including high blood pressure and diabetes. Your dietician will meet with you regularly to discuss your lab work, talk about your diet “do’s and don’ts,” and healthy eating habits to improve your quality of life.

Patient Care Technicians (PCTS)

Patient Care Technicians (PCT) work in the clinic to provide you with safe dialysis treatment. PCTs complete a dialysis training program and are required to be certified. In many clinics, PCTs are responsible for starting, monitoring during, and ending your dialysis treatment. Your PCT will share any concerns they have during your treatment with the nurse overseeing your care.

Your Team Behind the Scenes

The **Biomedical Technicians** maintain the dialysis machines and water quality in your clinic. They order dialysis supplies and reprocess dialyzers (artificial kidneys) for reuse. You may not see these team members because they work behind the scenes to make sure you are safe.

Often, the **Secretary or Unit Clerk** is the first person you will meet when coming to the dialysis clinic. They help the clinic to run smoothly and can direct you to the appropriate team member to answer your questions.

Another behind the scenes team member may be a clinic **Billing Person**. Most dialysis clinics have a billing person who can answer the questions you have about insurance coverage and clinic billing or payment questions.

Your **Vascular Access Team** will include an Access Coordinator, a Vascular Access Surgeon and an Interventional Radiologist. Your kidney doctor will refer you if you need help with your dialysis access.

My Questions

Ask Your Care Team:

- What concerns should I bring to your attention?
- What other team members help to make the clinic run smoothly?
- Who is my “primary” nurse?