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# PAC *Speaks*

A NEWSLETTER FOR PATIENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES

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Overcoming Needle Fear

## Tips for Overcoming Needle Fear

Almost no-one *likes* needles. But for some, needle phobia is much more than a minor fear. It's a terror that can scare you away from health or dental care; and if you need dialysis, you may face needles often.

*"Unless the medical field catches up with Star Trek (where Dr. McCoy gives injections with that device without needles), I am "stuck" (no pun intended)."* Lachyel Vaughn, PAC Chair, and Patient SME

Here, PAC Members and SMEs share their stories and tips for overcoming needle fear:

### **Take Charge of Your Needles** by *Chris Ullger, Patient SME and PAC Representative*

A Type 1 Diabetic since I was 16, it took a number of weeks for me to actually finally accept that needle sticks were going to be something "I HAD TO DO" for the rest of my life and it meant life or death. I chose to live. Over the years I have become an expert on giving shots, I can give a shot in the dark, I can give myself a shot in a moving car, heck I am pretty sure I could give myself a shot as I walked down the street. It's funny over the course of the last 20 years anytime I need to get a flu shot, or pneumonia shot I always ask if I can give myself the shot, I just prefer it. Maybe I am a control freak.

Fast forward to 2009 when I found out I was in renal failure and I had to again re visit this "needle fear". Dialysis of course involves 2 large needles to get adequate blood flow to clean your blood. So here I was again having anxiety, stressing over these needles. I for one just couldn't get past it so I started using buttonhole cannulation. Cannulating myself really has helped me get passed the fear of needles. I think knowing I am the one putting them in and the one in control has truly helped me deal with the fact that I have to have 2 large needles placed in my arm 3 times a week.

Learn your body, your arm and learn to self-cannulate yourself, it has really helped me get past my needle fear. It's a big step, but you can do it. I did.

### **Don't Look** by *Laverne Washington, PAC Representative*

Years ago I had needle fear. The way I overcame my fear of needles and being stuck was to turn my head and not look at the person sticking me, and think of something pleasant. It worked every time. I have been on dialysis for 6 years. The only time I feel the needle is when the nurse/tech goes into a new spot.

## My Top Four Tips *by Jessica Frysh, PAC Representative*

- 1. Numbing Agents:** Such as creams or sprays. In my case, I would just put an ice pack on the area until it felt numb. You're not putting harsh chemicals on your skin then.
- 2. Distraction:** Don't watch when putting the needle in. Watch TV while the needle is being placed, and that way your mind is occupied.
- 3. Self-Cannulate:** Learn how to put the needles in yourself. You are the best judge as to where the needle is going! I don't do this last one, but I know from experience that I've been told I would do really well with this.
- 4. Breathe through the pain!** Take a deep breath and blow through the pain as the needle is going in. Ask the tech or nurse to count 1,2,3 if it helps. Knowing that they are getting ready to poke is sometimes not a good thing, but some people like to be warned.

### From Kidney School:

<http://kidneyschool.org/m08/14/>

If you are afraid of even the idea of needles, there may be some other steps you can take to help yourself feel better. Check the list below for the things you think you might be able to do:

- Ask my doctor if PD is an option for me—and if not, why not.
- If I have an AV fistula, ask about the Buttonhole technique.
- Ask my doctor about desensitization therapy.
- Talk to other patients about how they handled their fears.
- Look into the possibility of hypnosis to help overcome my fear.
- Learn how to insert my own needles, so I am in control.

### ESRD Network PAC Chairpersons

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These PAC Chairpersons oversee the activities of the PAC Representatives in local facilities. PAC Chairs are happy to come out (schedule permitting) to Patient Meetings as guest speakers. If you would like a PAC Chairperson to be a guest speaker, please contact the Network's Community Outreach Coordinator at least one month before the meeting to allow for scheduling: