



# Patients helping patients

Dennis Bourque founded ReMend to offer mentoring to people with kidney disease

By Deborah Sullivan Brennan | 2:16 p.m. Feb. 2, 2016



Dennis Bourque, Executive Director Mentor ReMend Organization for kidney disease research, on Thursday at the UT in San Diego, California. *San Diego Union-Tribune*

Two and a half years ago, Scripps Ranch resident Dennis Bourque co-founded the patient organization ReMend to connect patients newly diagnosed with kidney disease with mentors who have experienced kidney disease themselves.

The goal was to take a chronic condition and help make it a manageable one. To do that, Bourque drew on both professional and personal experience.

A former CEO of a company that made medical equipment related to dialysis, he is also a lifelong patient himself, diagnosed in early childhood with a condition that gradually damaged his kidneys. Eventually, he underwent transplant surgery, receiving a kidney donated by one of his brothers.

Bourque, 61, formed ReMend, along with physicians at Balboa Nephrology Medical Group, Sharp Memorial Hospital, and the San Diego community dialysis centers, to give other kidney patients the best shot at handling their disease while continuing to live their lives.

Q: Please tell us about ReMend.

A: ReMend provides no-cost mentoring, encouragement and guidance to those affected by kidney disease, their families and others involved in their care and treatment. Our culturally diverse team of mentors have undergone dialysis, successful kidney transplants or kidney donations. We are trusted sources of information and support based on our own personal experiences.

Q: How does the patient/mentor model work for a supporting patients?

A: The model is simple. Referrals come to ReMend from a variety of sources, including the members of the patient's healthcare team such as a social workers, nephrologists or a nurse who is providing care for the patient. In addition, we receive referrals from ReMend's website. Our mentors do not offer medical advice. However we share our personal experiences with the patient regarding how we overcame challenges to maintain a high quality of life with kidney disease.

Q: How did you deal with your own case of kidney disease and its complications?

A: I have had kidney disease for over 60 years, and along the way, I have had an incredible medical team, along with the loving support and understanding of my wife and family. There is something to be said about "in sickness and in health." In addition, the support of my friends and co-workers is what helped me through the rough times. I had the normal denial mentality thinking that I could beat this disease; however, this was not the case. I had to come to acceptance of my situation and start empowering myself to take control of my own care.

Q: Please tell us about your experience receiving a kidney transplant?

A: Since my friends and co-workers knew about my kidney disease, many of them offered to donate their kidneys to me. In addition, my wife and young sons offered to donate their kidneys to me. Kidney donation from another person is an amazing gift of life, and since I come from a large family, I was lucky that one of my brothers was a very close match. I am forever grateful. My brother is doing great and he loves to share his story with anyone who might consider donating their kidney. It changed both of our lives and the bond between us is very special and everlasting.

Q: How has treatment for kidney disease progressed in recent years?

A: Unfortunately, kidney disease continues to grow at an alarming rate with the major causes of kidney disease being diabetes and high blood pressure, with over 26 million American adults having chronic kidney disease and millions of others at increased risk. The good news is early detection can help prevent the progression of kidney disease to kidney failure. Patients who are experiencing the early warning signs of kidney disease such as feeling more tired than usual and lacking energy, swelling around the ankles, trouble concentrating, and the need to urinate more often, especially at night, should see their doctor and get some simple blood and urine tests to measure their kidney function.

Q: Are there any new promising therapies on the way?

A: Altruistic kidney donation is on the rise. Kidneys donated from living donors offer better outcomes and a life-saving alternative to an often long, uncertain wait. The National Kidney Registry assists with matching living donors with potential recipients. There are also better options for more frequent dialysis, which can be offered in the patient's home environment.

Q: What are any benefits or fundraisers you participate in?

A: The majority of my time is spent raising the necessary funding for ReMend's programs. All of our mentoring services, education programs and mentor videos are provided at no cost to patients. This is made possible through funding and donations from the general public, government grants and corporate contributions. I am also still involved with Father Joe's Village, where I've been on the board of directors for 12 years.

Q: What are your tips for someone who is newly diagnosed with kidney disease?

A: It's perfectly normal to feel confused, scared, or even angry about this lifelong disease, but you cannot let it consume your life. Kidney disease affects not only you but also your entire family. My advice is to take advantage of the educational programs available to you and your family. It's important for both patients and family members to know that they are not alone.

Q: What is the best advice you ever received?

A: Lyrics from a song: "There's no dollar sign on a piece of mind"

Q: What is one thing people would be surprised to find out about you?

A: I always wanted to do voice-overs in Disney movies as I have a deep and resounding voice. Maybe that is next after ReMend!

Q: Please describe your ideal San Diego weekend.

A: A hike up and down at Torrey Pines Reserve with my wife and friends followed by lunch in Cardiff.

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