

# Travel Doesn't Stop When Dialysis Starts

By **Andrew Conkling**, Hemodialysis Patient, DPC Education Center Board Member

Traveling while on dialysis can seem like a scary thought, but it doesn't have to be. Traveling can be very helpful to the psyche of a dialysis patient. Seeing family and friends is important, as well as taking relaxing vacations. You may also want to see new places that you may not have had the chance to visit before you were on dialysis. There should be something good to come out of dialysis, so look for it wherever you can.

Take a look at your bucket list: is travel a big part? If so, time to get to it! If nothing else, traveling allows you to see how other clinics are organized, which can help you understand some of the things that you see in your home clinic. You may even be able to make a few suggestions to your home clinic that you found worked better for you. I've been on in-center hemodialysis dialysis for twelve years now. With the help of an excellent social worker and a wonderful clinic staff I was encouraged to continue traveling as I had done before starting dialysis. It's very important to most patients to have as close to the same social or work life as they had before they started dialysis. I regularly take trips to the Gulf of Mexico or to the upper mid-west to visit family. These trips are long enough that they would not be possible to take without making arrangements for treatments where I will be going. I have also had the opportunity to travel to San Francisco and Washington D.C. with Dialysis Patient Citizens (DPC) to advocate for dialysis patients' rights on Capitol Hill, something that I wouldn't have been able to do if I could not travel.

I was of course apprehensive the first time. I started with short trips that only required one treatment, and locations that were close to home just in case. However, in short order I was taking longer trips both in distance and time. I've been in



clinics of all sizes and locations and the differences between clinics can be drastic. Being proactive in your care is the key. The more you know about your own treatments, the easier time you will have.

Now that we have the "why" taken care of, let's move on to the "how." Most clinics, no matter the company that owns it, have a social worker and a unit secretary. These two people are normally the people that will help you the most as you start your journey. In addition, both DaVita and Fresenius, the two largest dialysis providers, have websites and toll free numbers you can call to get help planning your travel. You may also find it helpful to check out the dialysis facility compare tool from Medicare.gov. This can be very helpful when deciding what clinic you may want to use, --but remember the star ratings are not the only indicator of care quality. Don't be alarmed if your destination has only one or two star-rated facilities. Use the ratings as a guide to ask questions before receiving treatment.

Decide where it is you want to go.

This may seem simple enough but some consideration must be made.

The bigger the destination, the





more choices you may have in where you receive your treatments. Also, if your destination is a tourist area, you may need to be flexible on where and when you receive your treatments. Tourist areas have large numbers of traveling patients, and while they try their best to fit your needs, you may need to bend some as well. For example, you may normally receive treatments on Monday, Wednesday and Friday early in the morning. If you are traveling, you may have to receive treatment on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday in the afternoon. To avoid complications, make sure that whomever is helping you make the arrangements is clear on what days you are traveling to and from your destination so they may work with the destination to fit you in the best clinic for your needs.

Relationships with your home clinic staff and physicians are also very important. Your clinic staff and doctor will need to have your records sent to the travel clinic ahead of time. Most clinics that accept patients who are traveling will require at least a week's worth of flow sheets (the document your clinic uses to track your treatment information). They will also help to make sure that you receive any shots or tests you may need. Some states or clinic areas require that a traveling patient must have a tuberculous skin test within a year of travel. Your home clinic can administer that test and make sure records are sent to the travel clinic.

Travel can be a fun and a safe proposition if you plan and work together with your staff. Remember, it should be about you and your well-being. Staying informed during your normal treatments is very helpful so you know when something is not right while traveling. However, above all else, have fun! ●

#### Additional Resources for Travel:

**Davita Travel Support**-<https://www.davita.com/services/travel-support> or 1-800-244-0680

**Fresenius Travel Services**- <https://www.freseniuskidneycare.com/travel-services> or 1-866-434-2597

**Dialysis Facility Compare**- <https://www.medicare.gov/dialysisfacilitycompare/>

