

# Tornadoes, Hurricanes and Blizzards, Are you ready?

By **Mike Guffey**, Dialysis Patient Citizens Board Member, KCER Infectious Disease Workgroup Co-Chair

“Be prepared.”

**T**his may be a familiar phrase from your childhood, as it is from mine. However, it is also a good motto for dialysis patients and their families, especially as we head into the summer months with threats of severe weather throughout the country.

In addition to serving on the Board of both Dialysis Patient Citizens and the DPC Education Center, my “day job” is as a full-time Business Continuity Planner for a Midwestern financial institution with offices throughout the country. A large part of my job is to keep my company prepared for various potential service disruptions, many of the most common of which include weather-related events, ranging from tornadoes and hurricanes to blizzards and flooding.

Kidney patients are a special community that particularly needs to plan ahead for potential disruptions, no matter where along the kidney disease spectrum they may fall. It is critical for dialysis patients to make their necessary treatments, but it is also critical for transplant patients to continue taking their medications during such an event, and for pre-dialysis patients to follow their prescribed diets as well to help prevent the need for dialysis if possible.

In that spirit, here are some suggestions we all can follow to help prepare ourselves and our families for any local weather-related incidents or other disruptions.

- Plan ahead. A lot of the tools listed below are easy to find normally, so gather as much as possible now rather than waiting for a situation to occur.
- Maintain a Patient Identification card or other document with all of your personal contact information and medical needs: health status, nephrologist’s name and number, pharmacy name and number, insurance information, medication list, allergies, hepatitis status and other special needs.
- Keep two copies of your medical information and other important documents: one at home and one at another site not in the same neighborhood.
- Know how to contact your dialysis provider and their emergency patient hotline in case your local center is impacted. Re-establish contact with your center as soon as you can after a disruption.
- If possible, map out multiple routes to/from your center in case your primary route is not available. If you have transportation to your center, be aware of their emergency capabilities or alternatives. Make alternative arrangements for transportation if your provider is

not available (e.g. family members, neighbors, church members).

- Make sure your entire family is aware of your plans and trained to react. Children need to know addresses and phone numbers as well because “the white house by the park” may not be enough to get them to that location.
- When planning with children, it is often less threatening to plan around an absurd event. That is one reason many schools have enacted plans around zombie attacks or similar make believe situations.
- Prepare within your budget constraints. Do what you can afford. Don't strain your finances laying in supplies. Try to do it over time, focusing on items that do not expire quickly.
- Understand the Emergency Kidney Diet and make sure you have supplies available to follow it in case you need to miss one or more treatment(s), which hopefully will not occur.
- If you are on home dialysis, maintain sufficient dialysis supplies to cover at least a week of treatments.
- Pay attention to the emergency training provided by your center so you know how to disconnect yourself and take shelter at the clinic if so directed.
- Always try to carry your identification with you and have some cash on hand during a disruptive event. A lot of stores will not have working credit card machines after a disaster, so cash does become king.

This information and more can be found online from various resources including the large dialysis providers,

governmental sites (Ready.gov, FEMA.gov, CDC.gov) and preparedness/recovery organizations (RedCross.org, EmergencyPreparednessEssentials.org). For those without computers, information is also available from local health departments and many state and local emergency preparedness sites.

Additionally, kidney patients have a resource dedicated to providing information on emergency preparedness with the Kidney Community Emergency Response Coalition (KCER). KCER's mission is to “(c)ollaboratively develop, disseminate, implement, and maintain a coordinated preparedness and response framework for the kidney community.” Their website (kcercoalition.com) includes original documents specific to kidney patients, including the comprehensive KCER Resource Toolbox, as well as links to external sites like those listed above.

My involvement with DPC and the DPC Education Center led to my own involvement with KCER about three years ago. I was invited to join the KCER Pandemic and Infectious Disease Workgroup (speaking of ways to really put a damper on social introductions and ensure an empty seat on planes). My particular workgroup focuses with ensuring the kidney community is up-to-date on topics like the pandemic flu, Ebola, and the newest four-letter word, Zika. We work with the dialysis providers, the ESRD networks and external agencies such as the CDC to create educational materials for dialysis patients to prevent these serious diseases from being contracted. In the past month, I have volunteered to be the workgroup co-chair. ■