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**About Me: Stephanie Dixon,**  
*PAC Chair New York*

## My Life is in Your Hands: Please Wash Them!

**As told by Stephanie Dixon, Brooklyn, New York**

My name is Stephanie Dixon, I am from New York City and I am a mother and grandmother. I have been on dialysis since 2002. After going to the Emergency Room for a suspected heart attack and spending the night in ICU, with my daughter who at the time was 14-years-old, the doctors diagnosed me with kidney disease. I have been a member of the Patient Advisory Council (PAC) for

10 years & the National Coordinating Center (NCC) for 3 years. I am active on many kidney related committees including Healthcare Acquired Infections (HAI), both locally and nationally. As a member of the New York State Chronic Kidney Disease Champions, I endeavor to educate, encourage and empower patients to be active members of their healthcare team.

In 15 years, I have done both in-center and peritoneal (PD) hemodialysis. While receiving in-center dialysis, I have had two infections that luckily were minor and went away easily with antibiotics. While I was on PD, I was very thorough with my cleaning and hand hygiene; I have never given myself an infection. I believe that breaks in aseptic techniques were responsible for both of my infections.

Now that I am in-center, I am very vocal about how staff and patients should wash their hands. Before my infections, I was not bold enough to speak up when I saw things such as my nurse or staff member not washing their hands. Once I made a direct connection between my infections and something simple, like washing hands, it became clear to me that in order for me not to get sick, I had to speak up and take an active role in the quality of my healthcare.

Many of my fellow patients and friends have had major infections that caused additional complications or even led to hospitalization. Infections have a major impact on your health, and avoiding them can be the difference between life and death. Patients need to know basic techniques to their care, for example, clinic staff must change their gloves and wash their hands in between caring for each patient.

Most clinics are set up where many patients are being cared for by one facility staff member. This person can easily forget to wash their hands or change gloves in between patients. This can unintentionally promote the spread of bacteria that will lead to infections.

Today, I have gone as far as to make a sign that says, "Employees must wash their hands." as a gentle reminder for my care team at the facility to make sure they have performed the proper hand hygiene protocols before working with me. There are staff members that get offended by my sign, but there is nothing rude or insensitive about asking a facility staff member to follow aseptic techniques.

As people living with kidney failure, we have weakened immune systems. We must hold those caring for us and ourselves accountable for administering lifesaving care such as dialysis. Be a part of your healthcare team, and remind people that your life is in their hands.



If you have a concern, but you are uncomfortable talking to a facility staff member, you may call your ESRD Network at:

**IPRO End-Stage Renal Disease Network of New England (CT, MA, NH, RI, VT)**

1952 Whitney Avenue, 2nd Floor  
Hamden, CT 06517  
Patient Toll-Free:  
1 (866) 286-ESRD (3773)  
Fax: (203) 389-9902  
E-mail: [esrdnetwork1@ipro.us](mailto:esrdnetwork1@ipro.us)  
Web: [network1.esrd.ipro.org](http://network1.esrd.ipro.org)

**IPRO End-Stage Renal Disease Network of New York**

1979 Marcus Avenue, Lake Success, NY 11042  
Patient Toll-Free: 1 (800) 238-3773  
Fax: (516) 326-8929  
E-mail: [esrdnetwork2@ipro.us](mailto:esrdnetwork2@ipro.us)  
Web: [network2.esrd.ipro.org](http://network2.esrd.ipro.org)

**IPRO End-Stage Renal Disease Network of the South Atlantic (GA, NC, SC)**

606 Aviation Parkway, Suite 30  
Morrisville, NC 27560  
Patient Toll-Free: 1 (800) 524-7139  
Fax: (919) 388-9637  
E-mail: [esrdnetwork6@ipro.us](mailto:esrdnetwork6@ipro.us)  
Web: [network6.esrd.ipro.org](http://network6.esrd.ipro.org)

**IPRO End-Stage Renal Disease Network of the Ohio River Valley (IN, KY, OH)**

3201 Enterprise Parkway, Suite 210  
Beachwood, OH 44122  
Patient Toll-Free: 1 (844) 819-3010  
Fax: (216) 593-0101  
E-mail: [esrdnetwork9@ipro.us](mailto:esrdnetwork9@ipro.us)  
Web: [network9.esrd.ipro.org](http://network9.esrd.ipro.org)

The Network will accept grievances by phone, fax, email or postal mail.

**Tips for Working with Your Healthcare Team:**

- Check your vascular access daily for signs of infection such as redness, pus and swelling. Notify your healthcare professional if you notice these signs.
- Keep your catheter bandage clean and dry. If your bandage gets wet, notify your healthcare professional.
- If you have a central line catheter, ask your healthcare professional why it is needed, how long it will be in place, and if you can use a fistula or graft for your dialysis treatment.
- Make sure that all healthcare providers clean their hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer before and after caring for you or your vascular access site.

\*These tips are based on:

<https://www.cdc.gov/dialysis/patient/>

**Additional Resources**

- **Renal Support Network (RSN) Website: [www.RSNhope.org](http://www.RSNhope.org)**  
Phone: (818) 543-0896 Email: [info@RSNhope.org](mailto:info@RSNhope.org)
- **American Association of Kidney Patients (AAKP) [www.aakp.org](http://www.aakp.org)**  
Phone: (813) 636-8100 Toll-free: (800) 749-2257 E-mail: [info@aakp.org](mailto:info@aakp.org)
- **National Kidney Foundation (NKF)**  
[www.kidney.org/kidneydisease/communicate-healthcare-team](http://www.kidney.org/kidneydisease/communicate-healthcare-team)



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