



Starting a Support Group

A Dialysis Social Worker's View

Ashley Blackmon, LMSW is a social worker at Satellite Wellbound in Memphis, TN. She started a support group at her facility in 2017 and it continues to thrive and expand. She is passionate about her work in this area and shared some of her successes and challenges with keeping the group going.

- **Be creative** - We call our group *Connect Group*. This term seems more positive for patients and motivates them to attend.
- **Advertise** - Start talking with patients about the upcoming meeting several weeks in advance. I also have colorful flyers throughout the clinic. The flyer provides the details of the meeting and how it will benefit them. It is important for patients to know how the meeting will help them.
- **Invite others** - The meeting is open to all patients in the area. Notify area social workers of the upcoming Group and extend the invitation to their patients.
- **Find the best time** - It is a challenge for many patients to come back to the facility after treatment, consider holding the Group around noon with light refreshments. This allows patients to come before or after treatment.
- **Invite speakers** - If the meeting topic is transplant, have a transplant coordinator or transplant patient speak at the meeting. I have also had our dietitian, local vocational rehabilitation counselor, and social security administration as guest speakers.
- **Obtain feedback** - Talk with your patients to learn topics of interest; this will help with planning the meeting topics. After the meetings, talk with patients to learn what went well and what didn't. Knowing this information helps with planning future meetings.

SATELLITE HEALTHCARE

CONNECT GROUP

Group Purpose

- To provide a social outlet for individuals living with kidney disease and caregivers an opportunity to fellowship with peers
- Develop skills needed for personal growth and development
- Learn from one another's knowledge and experience
- Participants will get the opportunity to gain information from experts in the field from transplant, vocational rehabilitation, disability, etc. (as speakers are available)
- Opportunities to network

All Patients and Caregivers Welcome !

The biggest challenge for all of us is finding the time to plan and host the meeting. I really enjoy doing this for my patients so I find the time to get it done. I have seen patient confidence and understanding of ESRD grow based on what they learn from the *Connect Group* meetings. These meetings help patients feel connected to their peers and provide knowledge that can improve patient outcomes. It's a win-win for everyone!