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When it comes to the mounting out-of-pocket expenses of prescription medications for people living with chronic kidney disease and their comorbid conditions, it can be overwhelming. When you consider low and middle-income patients, it can create worsening health outcomes because of the lack of available resources to assist them in this area. No one should have to make life-altering decisions regarding affording prescription medications and managing their quality of life.

**Diabetes**

One day, while at work in 2003, I was feeling exhausted and lethargic. I went to the medical department to get checked out. The attending nurse asked me if I had ever had my glucose levels checked. Her question was foreign to me because I had not a clue to what she was alluding to. After explaining what glucose levels were, she retrieved blood from my finger, and her following comment changed my life forever. The nurse told me that my glucose level was 758 and that I needed to go directly to the nearest hospital's Emergency Room. Upon being seen by the Emergency Room Physician, he told me that my A1c was 11.7 and diagnosed me with Type 2 diabetes.

Furthermore, the physician referred me to an Endocrinologist as a follow-up for care. My physician told me that I needed to lose weight and learn to eat a healthier diet, but she never said that diabetes was the leading cause of kidney disease. The doctor also prescribed three different types of medications to help manage my diabetes, and they are as follows:

- **Levemir**: Insulin detemir, long-acting insulin, up to twenty-four hours in duration. Without insurance coverage, this insulin cost around $448.99 per month at that time for five flex pens. With insurance, I paid $75.00 per month.

- **Novolog**: a rapid-acting insulin lispro. This insulin works quickly to lower glucose levels, and I used this insulin before each meal. The average cost of this insulin without insurance is $161.99 per 3, 3ml of 100UNIT/ML pen, per month, according to SingleCare.com. With insurance, this same medication ranges from $77.67 to $106.98, per month depending on your pharmacy.

- When you incorporate the cost of insulin with a pill form of diabetes drug (Metformin) at a monthly price of $10.00 for a 60-day supply, respectfully, my total was on average $264.99 per month from 2003 to 2018.

**Dialysis Journey**

April 2013 is when I received the news from my endocrinologist that I was at 30% kidney function. During my ten-year relationship with my doctor, they never told me that diabetes was the number one leading cause of kidney disease. Nor was it ever explained why I was diagnosed with declining kidney function at Stage 3b. December 1, 2013, was the day of my very first Peritoneal Dialysis exchange. It was a strange sensation of experiencing dialysate flowing from a bag into my stomach. It was even a more immense sensation trying to understand the cost of the medication prescribed to help me manage my kidney health. Unlike my diabetes management, now I must incorporate the new cost and
management of kidney disease. I went from three diabetes medications to being prescribed an additional nine medications while on dialysis. They are as follows:

- **Erythropoietin (Epogen)** – Treatment for anemia.
- **Iron (Ferrous Sulfate)** – Iron supplements work with anemia medication.
- **Vitamin D** – Manage potential bone mineral loss (calcium and phosphorus).
- **Phosphorus Binders** – Reduce the amount of phosphorus absorbed from food.
- **B-complex Vitamin & Folic Acid** – Helps prevent infections and supports or promotes red blood cell growth, energy, good eyesight, brain function, good digestion, and nerve function.
- **Topical creams and antihistamines** – I was prescribed these creams due to my wound care and itching issues.
- **Vitamin E** – To assist with leg cramps that may occur at nighttime.
- **Lisinopril & Benazepril** – Both of these medications are ACE inhibitors and are used to lower my blood pressure.

At this point in my journey, I was on a total of twelve medications to help manage my diabetes and kidney disease while on dialysis. With Medicare and supplemental private insurance, the cost of my monthly prescribed medications averaged $376.23. Without any insurance, my prescriptions would have cost over $4,000.00 per month.

**Transplantation**

Through my dialysis facility's tremendous effort, I qualified for the active Transplant Waitlist at my Transplant Center on February 16, 2016. On April 21, 2017, I received my new organ, but it was not functioning due to Delayed Graft Function (DGF). Due to my new kidney not working correctly, I was doing twenty-four hours of Hemodialysis every other day. During my transplant journey, I experienced several setbacks that the average transplant recipient may not endure in their journey. My experiences included a total of four surgeries (transplant, blood clot, hemorrhaging, and a laparoscopic-peritoneum window), hospitalized for thirty-three days, and my kidney did not begin to function until the forty-seventh day. With these challenges came a plethora of medications to treat and manage my kidney health. In my transplant journey, I had to do away with some of the dialysis prescribed medications and begin my life on post-kidney transplant medications. The following is a list of the medicines that my Transplant Nephrologist prescribed for me after my kidney transplant:

- **Mycophenolate (CellCept)** – Anti-rejection – Cost: $226.56 per 30 tablets, 360mg.
- **Tacrolimus (Prograf)** – Anti-rejection – Cost: $71.96 per 30 tablets, 1mg,
- **Prednisone** – Anti-rejection – Cost: 4.00 per 30 tablets, 5mg.
- **Amlodipine (Norvasc)** – Hypertension – Cost: $9.00 per 30 tablets, 5 mg.
- **Nexium (Omeprazole)** – Protect Stomach/Nausea – Cost: $15.00 per 30 tablets, 20 mg.
- Metoprolol – Hypertension – Cost: $9.00 per 30 tablets, 25mg.
- Vitamin D3 2000 iu – Cost: $20.63 per 200 tablets.
- Gabapentin – Diabetic Neuropathy – Cost: $36.59 per 90 tablets, 100 mg.
- Lasix (Furosemide) – Treat Fluid Buildup – Cost: $4.00 per 30 tablets, 20 mg.
- Senna – Laxative to prevent constipation – Cost: $8.12 per 60 tablets, 8.6 mg.
- Ciprofloxacin – Antibiotic for stent – Cost: $18.51 per 14 tablets, 500mg.
- Nystatin – Oral Supplement (Swish and Swallow) – Cost: $26.88 per 1 tube, 30mg of 10000 unit/gm.
- Valganciclovir (Valcyte) – Antibiotic (for the 1st six months after the transplant) – Cost: $1,537 per 30 tablets
- Aspirin – Blood Thinner – Cost: $7.25 per 30 tablets
- Pravastatin – Treats High Cholesterol – Cost: $12.22 per 30 tablets
- Coreg (Carvedilol) – Hypertension – Cost: $23.49 per 60 tablets
- Chlorthalidone – Hypertension, and Fluid – Cost: $19.47 per 30 tablets
- Magnesium Oxide – Cost: $12.40 per 120 tablets
- Neutra-Phos – Preventing kidney stones and lowering the pH of the urine. Cost: $43.53 per 100 tablets.

When you consider the socioeconomic status, comorbidities, age, gender, and geographical locations, the cost of medications can vary for everyone. The financial burden of medicine can be stressful at times. Medicine is necessary to help treat kidney disease and the comorbid conditions that are associated with this disease. The cost of medications should not cause the poor, afflicted, and downtrodden to suffer even more due to lack of access to medical coverage, skyrocketing drug costs, and other limitations that prevent the most underserved communities from affording life-sustaining medications. I am grateful to be at a point in my life where I am no longer on as many medications as I was at that time. Yet, for those that are battling multiple comorbid conditions, I hope that the cost of drug therapies is more affordable and accessible for all.

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