

He lived a relatively pain-free life until he got sick in recent years. His kidneys became enlarged and filled with cysts.

“I turned 50 a couple of years ago, and four or five weeks later I started dialysis. So the good news is they were right. And the bad news is they were right,” he told The Telegram Saturday at the first annual Dialysis Dash in Bowring Park.

Andrews, who’s from Port de Grave and lives in Conception Bay South, said he now spends about 4 ½ hours in a dialysis chair three days a week.

“And boy, I tell you, that was quite a disruption in my life,” he said.

“I used to think, ‘Poor me. I’m losing Monday, Wednesday, Friday out of my life.’ And then I said, ‘You know what? I’ll make the most out of Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and I’d kick the living crap out of Tuesday, Thursday Saturday and Sunday.’ So that’s what I decided to do,” he said.

He might not run as fast as he used to, but Andrews still ran five kilometres at the fundraiser in 29 minutes. He was one of about 200 people who took part in the Health Care Foundation event, which raised money toward the purchase of new dialysis chairs in Eastern Health facilities.

The old chairs were fairly basic, and made it difficult for Andrews — and hundreds of other dialysis patients in the region — to get comfortable.

“They have no remote mechanism to change your body positions, to raise or lower your back or anything, so if you get uncomfortable, you actually have to ask a nurse to come over, and that’s very difficult for them,” he said, adding he has had a test run in the handful of new chairs that have already been purchased.

“You can actually move your body around however you want, so each time you get uncomfortable, you can change your body position. That’s huge for us. It changes the whole experience for us,” he said.

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Andrews, who raised more than \$1,100 for the fundraiser, was extremely thankful for the hard work all the participants put in. Because he spends at least 13 hours in one of those chairs every week, it’s personal for him.

“I’m not easily overwhelmed but,” he said, followed by an emotional pause. “Yeah, it meant a lot.”

The tally

At the end of Saturday’s Dialysis Dash, \$26,000 had been tallied up and more donations were coming in.

Linda Ivany, regional manager for dialysis for Eastern Health, said each chair costs up to \$6,000. Saturday’s haul buys four chairs and change — a good start, but only a fraction of the goal to bring in 55 new chairs.

Ivany said there are about 350 dialysis patients in the region she covers — St. John's, Carbonear, Burin, Clarenville and Bonavista — and about 450 in the whole province.

While the new chair model provides comfort and ease for patients, it's also good news for nurses, Ivany said.

"It actually has a foot rest, which — again with the remote — can come up and down. One of the common problems with our patients is they cramp a lot, and prior to this, the patient would actually use the nurse's leg to push on when they'd get a cramp," she said, adding foot rests were a "must have" when Eastern Health was looking at chairs.

"If the patient has a critical incident, the chair can go right back flat, whereas before the nurses would have to get in behind it and pull it back and put it down flat."

Ivany said she was very pleased with the turnout at the inaugural event.

"We're planning on doing it every year from here on in. We've never really had a major fundraiser," she said.

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