

Volunteerism can be a meaningful activity for patients no longer working, or patients who are looking for activities that will connect them with other people of shared interests, and may enhance their quality of life. We strongly encourage you to address this topic with your patients. Asking about someone's volunteer history or about how a volunteer has touched their lives in the past is a good way to engage your patient in the subject of volunteering. We hope that you will reprint this article in your facility or corporate patient newsletter and post it on your patient bulletin board.

## **The Benefits of Volunteering**

Let's face it. Most people on dialysis are not employed. Some individuals long to work again but have found managing a job as well as dialysis to be simply too difficult and exhausting. Others may voluntarily remove themselves from the grind of the workday world, if financially feasible, in order to spend more time with family or attend to health issues. Many others are in retirement. Regardless of which reason applies, everyone whose employment has ended due to age, disability, or incompatibility with medical treatment regimens may face similar effects: the loss of feeling useful, lowered self-esteem, having too much time on one's hands, having fewer social outlets, loss of self-confidence, and perhaps depression. If this describes you or someone you know, please consider the benefits of volunteering.

Volunteering is when you give your time to help another person, group, or cause. There is a long list of possible advantages to those who volunteer. Author Allan Luks explores some of them in his book, [The Healing Power of Doing Good: The Health and Spiritual Benefits of Helping Others](#). Some of the advantages he lists are:

- A more optimistic and happier outlook on life
- A heightened sense of well-being
- An increase in energy
- A feeling of being healthy
- Decreased feelings of loneliness, depression, and helplessness
- A sense of connectedness with others
- A greater sense of calmness and relaxation
- An improvement in insomnia
- A stronger immune system
- A reduction in pain
- Speedier recovery from surgery

Volunteer activities also offer a meaningful way to interact in a world that may otherwise focus on the limits of people who are on dialysis instead of showcasing what they can do, not only for themselves, but also for others. Volunteering is a selfless way to “give back” and acknowledge one’s own prosperities. It’s a way to promote lifelong learning and also self-examination. Volunteering can add structure to one’s daily life. Lastly, in some cases it’s possible for a volunteer experience to result in a paid position. Whatever your motives, consider volunteering for the potential benefits it holds for you.

To find out about volunteer opportunities in your community, please refer to the following table of suggested resources:

## Contact Organizations for Volunteer Opportunities

- Local resources that you would have interest in, such as church, school, hospital, nursing home, library, community center, etc.
- United Way <http://national.unitedway.org>
- RSVP (Retired Senior Volunteer Program) [www.seniorcorps.gov](http://www.seniorcorps.gov)
- SCORE (Service Corps of Retired Executives) [www.score.org](http://www.score.org)
- [www.idealists.org](http://www.idealists.org)
- [www.volunteersolutions.org](http://www.volunteersolutions.org)

Or, for volunteer opportunities you can do from home:

- Volunteer Match [www.volunteermatch.org](http://www.volunteermatch.org) (offers “virtual volunteering”—do your volunteering from home; generally requires a computer, Internet connection, phone, and/or fax machine)
- Network for Good [www.networkforgood.org](http://www.networkforgood.org) (offers “online volunteering”—do your volunteering from home; would require a computer, Internet connection, phone, and/or fax machine)
- ESRD Network #15 Patient Leadership Committee – <http://www.esrdnet15.org/pts.htm>.