

# Dialysis Patient Tackles 250-Mile Bike Ride

The annual Tour DaVita rode through Connecticut and Massachusetts in mid-September. Over the past five events, more than 1,600 employees, physicians, family members and friends have participated in the event. In those years, the rides have raised over \$3 million for the Kidney TRUST program, which focuses on increasing awareness of chronic kidney disease (CKD) through public education and early-detection testing programs. Following this year's ride, *RBT* caught up with dialysis patient Mark Richardson to see how his ride went.

What motivated you to participate in the event? Had you been part of a bike event before?

I ride to and from dialysis and because of that cycling comes up with the staff at the clinic where I get my treatments. One day my nephrologist, Dr. Singri, asked if I'd be interested in participating in Tour DaVita, a three-day 250-mile bike ride. I said it sounded like a fun event unlike anything I'd ever done. I'd never been in a big, organized event like that and that I'm always interested in new experiences. I also knew there'd be a lot of DaVita teammates there and if they were anything like the ones at my center here in Columbus, I knew I'd be around people I like and can relate to.

What advice would you give other people using dialysis getting ready to do something this physical?

Start small and build as you feel comfortable. When I got sick (and ultimately found out I had end-stage renal disease), it took me a year to get back in shape. And then I started by riding a quarter-mile every day; when that became comfortable I increased my mileage slowly. Ultimately, as I trained for Tour DaVita, I built up to 35-mile rides.

How long have you been on dialysis?

Three years.

Could you provide a little information about your life outside of dialysis?

I live a pretty normal life. I spend a lot of time walking dogs around my neighborhood. I have a great support network of good friends and family. The people at DaVita (I know I say "DaVita" a lot, but as any dialysis patient will tell you, the people at your clinic become family to you) are helping keep me alive so I try to enjoy the life they give me. Some people come into dialysis and they fight it and are scared by kidney disease. I see it a different way because dialysis is keeping me going so that I can truly live life.

What was the ride itself like?

The scenery was gorgeous, the camaraderie was infectious and the challenge was serious. The hills were very hard ... scratch that, "hills" is not the right term; they were mountains. But on the second day, the hills were no match for me. I simply couldn't go slow. I got a major release of endorphins—like a runner's high. I see hills as "energy banks," everything you put into climbing the hill you get back on the descents and flats. A constant mental trick I played with myself had to do with explorer Ernest Shackleton. I figured that if Shackleton could take people across Antarctica, certainly I can finish a ride in the Berkshires!

What was the highlight of the event for you?

In an event like this, there isn't just one highlight but I'll pick one. One day involved a long ride right next to a river, and the leaves were just starting to change in New England. It was amazing. And during that stretch, I had a 45-minute conversation with a fellow rider who works at DaVita. As with so many at the event, our conversation started with me telling her my story about why I was riding in the Tour and what it's like being a dialysis patient undertaking such a long ride. But she, like so many others, said that she cares for so many patients who simply couldn't do an event like Tour DaVita and wanted to know how I did it. I don't mind telling my story to those involved in providing dialysis care.

Is there anything else you'd like to add about your experience?

People kept telling me what an inspiration I was, but honestly, my fellow Tour riders did as much for me as they said I did for them. In an event like this you see yourself in others and they made me feel like I was progressing and doing better throughout the rides. People liked what they saw and that was an emotional—and thus physical—boost to me. I hope to come back next year and I want to see more patient riders. If you are blessed with health that allows you to do something like this, there is nothing that makes you feel better. *RBT*

