

March 2018 Caregiver of the Month: Sheryl Suski!



The Things We Do for Love

In February of 2010, Sheryl met Tim on a dating website while she was living in Michigan. They had dated for about eight months when Tim found out that he was in stage five kidney failure and immediately went on dialysis. During those eight months, Sheryl fell in love with Tim and knew she would stay by his side. She learned as much as she could about his condition so she could provide the best care possible for him.

Tim did general construction on retail jobs which required him to travel, each job lasting an average of six to eight weeks. Sheryl began traveling with Tim, making sure all of his medical needs were met. For five years, Sheryl set up a make-shift hospital room in each of the hotel rooms they stayed in, arranging and administering his dialysis and disposing of medical wastes properly. This was no easy task. Each trip required Sheryl to load up 60 boxes of solutions, each one weighing 40 pounds. She also made arrangements for his other medical supplies to be delivered to whatever city they were staying in.

Sheryl, who has a career background in phlebotomy, ended up selling her house in Michigan four years ago and moved to Missouri to be with Tim, sacrificing her relationships with family and friends and giving up her health benefits, thereby risking her own health care needs.

Tim, now 52, has had a decline in his health over the past four months. It began with an infection which put him in the hospital. Tim has had three surgeries in four months and has more scheduled. He now has a fistula in his arm to allow for permanent hemodialysis. He goes to the dialysis clinic Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Sheryl takes him to dialysis and keeps him company while they have lunch together. Sheryl also takes Tim to doctor's appointments on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Sheryl maintains communication with medical staff ensuring that Tim receives proper medical care. Tim is on a waiting list for a kidney transplant which can take up to seven years to receive. In addition to his kidney related ailments, Tim suffers from herniated disks in his spine causing severe pain. Sheryl provides therapeutic massages several times throughout the day to reduce the number of back spasms. There are also developing concerns with his parathyroid requiring him to see a specialist.

In addition to making sure Tim's medical needs are met, Sheryl also does the shopping, laundry, cleaning, and meal prep to ensure he is meeting the recommended dietary guidelines consistent with the peritoneal dialysis diet. Sheryl also makes sure Tim maintains contact with family, as she feels it's important. Sheryl herself is the mother of three adult sons. Sheryl does all of this on her own without the help of outside supports.

Sheryl's advice to other caregivers is to "Be patient, you never know what someone is going through. Often times they don't feel good and can be grumpy or snippy. It takes a lot of energy for a person to be in pain all the time. Encourage them to be active as much as possible so they can be healthy. Always be honest with them about everything from the status of their conditions to the way they are treating you. They need to be reminded that you are human too. And don't get burned out. Try to take a break."

Sheryl does this by taking a two week vacation every year to see her parents in Florida, though she didn't get to see them this past year due to the decline in Tim's health. His daily appointments have consumed their time. Sheryl and Tim both love woodworking. They are hopeful to get back to doing what they love together soon. "He has hurdles to get over but he will be ok," says Sheryl.