

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

'I want to get up and go. I want to take care of someone'

KEHA IRELAND | 35 | KIDNEY | Waiting for seven months

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Seven months ago, Keha Ireland was calling the shots as a triage nurse at an Elmhurst clinic.

Now, she is attended by nurses at least three times a week during dialysis as a consequence of lupus, a chronic autoimmune disease that has placed her on the waiting list for a kidney.

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Keha Ireland (left) talks with medical staff members Latonia Treadwell (center) and Lena Yelvington while Ireland undergoes dialysis at Resurrection Health Care West Suburban Medical Center in Oak Park.

(John J. Kim/Sun-Times)

PHOTO GALLERY



[Life on the transplant list](#)

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The 35-year-old mother of four can no longer work. She can't grocery shop or make dinner for her family. She can't even pick up her 1-year-old baby.

Her children are, at turns, upset, overprotective and bewildered by her ill health. Her husband is distant, she said.

"I'm still one of those people, I want to get up and go," said Ireland. "I want to take care of someone."

She can't -- at least not until a kidney comes through.

Her sister, Tameica Short, 31, said the family is heartbroken. "I don't like seeing her like that," Short said. "Sometimes, I can't sit and talk to her because she's tired. There's nothing else I can do but pray."

One of six children raised on the city's West Side, Ireland was 31 when she was diagnosed with lupus. It attacked her kidneys, which eventually shut down.

She swelled to 225 pounds before dialysis helped her lose the excess fluid, brining her weight to 150 pounds. A bad reaction to a drug caused her hair to fall out. It's growing back in patches.

She remembers bowling and shooting pool -- favorite hobbies before her illness. She loved walking in the rain but can't do it anymore because her immune system is depressed and her catheter can't get wet.

She thinks about what motherhood was like when her eldest daughter, now 18, was just a baby. Her 1-year-old daughter's life is far different.

"I have to sit down and let her crawl in my lap," said Ireland. "I can't lift her. She follows me with her arms around my leg."

She remembers her baby girl's first communication with her -- waving goodbye.

Said Ireland: "She's used to me leaving."

A new kidney, she said, would give her a chance to reclaim her independence, her energy.

"I know it won't go totally back the way it was. But it will get close to it. I'll be able to go back to work and be able to care for my kids without them being embarrassed."

Kara Spak

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Gift of Hope, an Elmhurst-based non-profit, also answers questions about organ donation and gives information on how to become an organ donor at Giftofhope.org