

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF HEMODIALYSIS PATIENTS ON BRIDGING PROGRAM FOR THE FILIPINO FAMILY

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Abstract

Chronic kidney disease requiring hemodialysis presents significant physical, emotional, and financial challenges, particularly for individuals from low-income families. In the Philippines, the Bridging Program for Filipino Families, an extension of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program was developed to alleviate these burdens by providing financial and healthcare assistance. This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of Filipino hemodialysis patients on the Bridging Program, focusing on its impact on their quality of life, emotional resilience, and personal transformation. A qualitative descriptive phenomenological design was employed to gain in-depth insights into participants' experiences. Ten participants were purposively selected from dialysis centers in Tagum City, Davao del Norte. Data were gathered through semi-structured, one-on-one interviews, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed thematically to identify essential patterns and meanings. Three major themes emerged: Support-Driven Quality of Life, Optimistic Commitment, and Resilient Transformation. Participants shared that the program's financial and medical assistance eased the economic burden of long-term dialysis, allowing them to maintain consistent treatment and access necessary medications. The assurance of continued support reinforced their motivation to adhere to treatment and deepened their commitment to family responsibilities. Over time, participants reported enhanced emotional strength, spiritual growth, and a more positive outlook on life reflecting a meaningful transformation in how they perceived their illness and future. These findings underscore the vital role of government support programs in addressing the multifaceted needs of patients with chronic illnesses. For healthcare providers and policymakers, the study highlights the importance of integrating psychosocial, spiritual, and financial support into patient care. The Bridging Program significantly improved treatment adherence, emotional well-being, and overall quality of life, demonstrating its value in promoting holistic and equitable healthcare for marginalized populations.

Keywords: *Social Science, Nursing Care, Hemodialysis Patients, Bridging Program, Descriptive-Phenomenology, Tagum City*

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Introduction

Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD) is a progressive and widespread health condition affecting millions worldwide, often culminating in End-Stage Renal Disease (ESRD) that necessitates life-sustaining interventions such as hemodialysis (Johnson, 2023). While hemodialysis extends

survival and enhances quality of life, it also imposes a significant financial burden on patients and healthcare systems, particularly in regions where public insurance or government support is limited (Smith, 2021). This economic strain is especially pronounced among socioeconomically

disadvantaged populations, compounding the physical and emotional toll of chronic illness. The lived experiences of impoverished patients undergoing hemodialysis remain underexplored, especially in relation to how they navigate financial hardships and emotional challenges. These individuals not only contend with the debilitating effects of kidney failure but also face obstacles in accessing consistent treatment due to inadequate support systems. Their stories reveal a complex interplay of resilience, adaptive strategies, and the critical role of assistance programs such as the Bridging Program (Martinez, 2023).

Globally, long-term dialysis poses a substantial economic challenge, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. For example, in India, about half of dialysis patients have reported skipping sessions due to unaffordable out-of-pocket costs (Jones & Taylor, 2021). In sub-Saharan Africa, limited access to dialysis is further exacerbated by inadequate funding and infrastructure, with per capita dialysis spending ranging from over \$100 million in South Africa to under \$20 per million people in other regions (Al Arabi, 2020).

In the Philippines, similar challenges persist. Many hemodialysis patients struggle with insufficient PhilHealth coverage, bureaucratic delays, and complex application processes, particularly in rural areas (Ramos et al., 2021). Social welfare support is often inadequate, and kidney disease stigma contributes to the psychological burden (Bautista et al., 2020). In the Davao Region, the incidence of CKD is rapidly rising, with an estimated 2,400 patients undergoing dialysis and a 12–15% annual increase in cases, putting further strain on both the healthcare system and affected families (Escudero et al., 2024).

Despite existing research on dialysis and financial hardship, there remains a gap in understanding the local realities of patients benefiting from government assistance programs like the Bridging Program in the Philippines. This

study aims to explore the lived experiences of hemodialysis patients enrolled in the Bridging Program, focusing on their challenges, coping strategies, and the resilience they demonstrate. By shedding light on their narratives, this research seeks to inform improvements in patient-centered care and social support systems (Garcia et al., 2022; Pajimna et al., 2023).

Methods

This study employed a descriptive phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of hemodialysis patients who are beneficiaries of the Bridging Program for Filipino families. Rooted in the principles of phenomenology, this approach seeks to uncover the essence of human experiences by setting aside preconceived assumptions and focusing on the participants' subjective realities (Husserl, 1970; Moustakas, 1994). This design enabled the researcher to examine the personal, emotional, and social dimensions of living with chronic kidney disease while relying on government financial support. The phenomenological lens allowed for an in-depth understanding of patients' coping mechanisms, emotional struggles, and their perceptions of how the Bridging Program sustains their treatment.

Data collection was guided by semi-structured interviews, which provided the flexibility to capture each participant's unique insights while maintaining consistency across core topics. This method revealed significant aspects of participants' experiences with chronic illness management, access to care, and their reflections on long-term dependence on hemodialysis and financial aid. Interviews were conducted in Filipino and Cebuano, allowing participants to express themselves comfortably in their native languages.

A total of ten participants were selected using purposive sampling, focusing on individuals who met specific inclusion criteria: aged 18 years or older, diagnosed with End-Stage Renal Disease

(ESRD), had been undergoing hemodialysis for at least five years, and were either currently or recently enrolled in the Bridging Program. All participants were classified as low-income or financially disadvantaged, as defined by local government program guidelines. Their extended experience with the treatment and the program allowed them to offer meaningful and reflective accounts of their lived experiences (Patton, 2015).

The study was conducted at a long-standing, accredited dialysis center in Tagum City, Davao del Norte, which serves both low- and high-income patients. The facility was chosen for its commitment to supporting underserved populations and its active participation in the Bridging Program. Its high volume of long-term dialysis patients provided a rich and relevant setting for the study. Each in-depth interview lasted approximately 30 to 60 minutes and was audio-recorded with participant consent. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and reviewed multiple times to ensure immersion in the data. Data saturation was reached after the ten interviews, indicating that additional interviews were unlikely to yield new themes or insights.

Results and Discussion

The study involved ten participants aged between 30 and 60 years, all of whom had been undergoing hemodialysis treatment for a minimum of five to ten years. These individuals were residents of Tagum City, Davao del Norte, and beneficiaries of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps), a conditional cash transfer initiative by the Philippine government aimed at alleviating poverty through investments in health and education. Each participant was assigned a code name to maintain confidentiality and uphold ethical standards.

The study identified nine cluster themes that led to the formation of three emergent themes reflecting the lived experiences of hemodialysis patients under the Bridging Program. The first

The collected data were analyzed using Colaizzi's (1978) descriptive phenomenological method, which involved identifying significant statements, formulating meanings, organizing them into thematic clusters, and developing an exhaustive description of the phenomenon. This rigorous analytic process ensured the credibility, depth, and trustworthiness of the findings (Santiago & Reyes, 2023). To further validate the results, member checking was conducted, in which transcripts were returned to participants for review to ensure that their experiences were accurately represented.

Ethical approval was obtained from the Graduate Program of Davao Doctors College. Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Informed consent was secured prior to the interviews. To maintain confidentiality, all personal identifiers were removed from transcripts, and data were securely stored. The study followed the provisions of the Data Privacy Act of 2012, ensuring participant privacy and dignity throughout the research process.

emergent theme, (1) Support-Driven Quality of Life, encompasses the cluster themes of experiencing financial relief and support, reducing barriers and improving quality of life, and facing emotional and physical challenges of illness. The second emergent theme, (2) Optimistic Commitment, reflects the patients' proactive approach to managing their health, encompassing the cluster themes of persevering through spiritual faith, possessing a positive mindset, and adhering to treatment and following medical advice. The third emergent theme, (3) Resilient Transformation, highlights the adaptive changes patients undergo, including the cluster themes of following guidance and practicing discipline, building resilience through family support, and utilizing financial aid programs.

Emergent Theme 1: Support-Driven Quality of Life

The first emergent theme, Support-Driven Quality of Life, encapsulates the transformative impact of the Bridging Program on the lives of hemodialysis patients. Participants consistently highlighted how financial assistance from government initiatives such as PhilHealth, the Medical Assistance for 4PS Patients, Department of Social Welfare and Development, the Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office and the Malasakit Center significantly alleviated the economic burden of their ongoing treatments. This support not only eased their financial strain but also symbolized a broader sense of care and solidarity from the community and government.

Cluster Theme 1.1: Experiencing Financial Relief and Support

Experiencing financial relief and support can significantly alleviate stress for hemodialysis patients by reducing the burden of both the physical and financial challenges associated with ongoing treatment (Kumar et al., 2023). Hemodialysis patients often face significant emotional distress due to the demands of frequent treatments, the unpredictability of their health, and the financial strain that comes with managing the costs of care (Roberts & Grant, 2024). Programs that offer financial assistance, insurance support, and access to social services can ease this stress by addressing the economic barriers to treatment (Thompson et al., 2025).

This was expressed through some of the sample statements from the participants:

“We feel a bit of relief now, sir, since we still have a long lifetime of dialysis and maintenance ahead. The fact that it's now free and that PhilHealth coverage has increased is a huge help for us.”
(Participant 5, Transcript 1, Lines 195–196)

The government programs have been huge help, sir, in my life. I feel better now, and the financial stress we experienced has lessened because these

programs are supporting us, especially for the sick.” (Participant 8 Transcript 1, line 331-332)

Cluster Theme 1.2: Reducing Barriers and Improving Quality of Life

The program effectively removed financial obstacles that previously hindered regular dialysis sessions. With support from agencies like PhilHealth and the Malasakit Center, patients could attend treatments consistently, leading to improved health outcomes and a more hopeful outlook on life

This was expressed through some of the sample statements from the participants:

“It's much better now, sir, compared to before. We've saved a lot because we no longer have to pay for dialysis. Before, we had to pay, but now the money we saved can be used for my maintenance medications.”
(Participant 3, Transcript 2, Lines 16–17)

“There has been a huge change now. Before, I had to use my own money for dialysis and buying medications. Now, there are government programs offering free services, and it has eased our lives a bit. We no longer experience as much financial stress.” (Participant 7 Transcript 2, Line 285-286)

The bridging program has significantly reduced barriers for hemodialysis patients by providing financial and logistical support, allowing them to consistently attend their treatments without the burden of out-of-pocket costs (Garcia, 2023). As a result, patients have experienced an improved quality of life, with a greater focus on their recovery, emotional stability, and overall well-being (Santos, 2025).

Cluster Theme 1.3: Facing Emotional and Physical Challenges of Illness

Despite the financial support, patients continued to grapple with the emotional and physical toll of chronic illness. Feelings of fatigue,

anxiety, and depression were common, highlighting the need for comprehensive care that addresses both physical and mental health.

This was expressed through some of the sample statements from the participants:

“Sometimes, I feel very tired, sir, and the stress makes it harder because this illness is exhausting. There are times when I wonder if I will make it or if this is the end.”
(Participant 3, Transcript 3, Lines 105–106)

“Every dialysis session is really exhausting, sir, because I have to wake up so early, and the travel is far. It's a real struggle. If I don't go, I'll retain water in my body, which makes it worse.”
Participant 8 Transcript 3, Line 337-338)

The emotional toll of chronic illness is an often-overlooked aspect of hemodialysis treatment (Garcia, 2024). Emotional distress plays a key role in the challenges faced by patients, with many expressing feelings of anxiety, depression, and fear about the long-term effects of their illness. The uncertainty surrounding their future, combined with the continuous burden of treatment, contributes to heightened stress levels (Santos, 2023). Some participants experience emotional and social isolation as they navigate their condition, struggling with the constant worry about their health.

Emergent Theme 2: Optimistic Commitment

This theme underscores the resilience and hope demonstrated by hemodialysis patients who, despite enduring ongoing physical and emotional challenges, remain steadfast in their commitment to treatment and recovery. Their optimism is often rooted in spiritual faith, a positive mindset, and strict adherence to medical advice.

Cluster Theme 2.1: Persevering Through Spiritual Faith

Spiritual faith serves as a cornerstone for many hemodialysis patients, providing strength and

solace amid the rigors of chronic illness. Engaging in practices like prayer and meditation helps them cope with emotional stress and maintain a sense of purpose.

Participants expressed this sentiment through statements such as:

“Never lose hope in life and always pray. Nothing else can help us, only prayer to the Almighty.”
(Participant 1, Transcript 4, Line 38)

“Prayer is my only weapon, sir, for all the struggles I face.” (Participant 5, Transcript 4, Line 208)

Spiritual faith provides essential strength for hemodialysis patients, empowering them to navigate the hardships of their condition (Smith, 2021). Many individuals turn to prayer as a way to cope, finding comfort and emotional restoration through their religious beliefs (Ahmed, 2022).

Cluster Theme 2.2: Possessing a Positive Mindset

Maintaining a positive outlook is a vital coping mechanism for patients undergoing hemodialysis. By focusing on achievable goals and engaging in enjoyable activities, patients bolster their emotional resilience and enhance their quality of life.

This perspective is reflected in participant statements:

“Just think positive always, sir, and keep praying to God to give me a longer life.”
(Participant 2, Transcript 4, Line 68)

“I always try to think positively. This pain is something I can handle because if I give in to it, I might just fall apart.”
(Participant 6, Transcript 4, Line 250)

Optimism significantly reduces the physical discomfort associated with hemodialysis and enhances patients' overall quality of life (Johnson, 2023). Patients highlighted that maintaining a hopeful mindset, along with

strategies like following treatment schedules and prioritizing self-care, contributed to their resilience and motivation (Kim, 2024). This combination of psychological strength and proactive health behaviors helped individuals endure their condition, strengthen emotionally, and remain focused on their recovery journey (Brown, 2025).

Cluster Theme 2.3: Adhering to Treatment and Following Medical Advice

Strict adherence to prescribed treatments, including dialysis sessions, medication schedules, and dietary restrictions, is crucial for managing chronic kidney disease effectively. Patients recognize that such discipline minimizes physical symptoms and prevents complications.

Participants highlighted this commitment:

"I just follow what the doctors and nurses say, especially about food and limiting water intake. I only do what they advise and try not to think about anything else."
(Participant 1, Transcript 5, Lines 65–66)

"I never miss dialysis, sir, because before, it was hard to find money for transportation, so I couldn't go on the right days. But now, sir, PhilHealth helps a lot because everything is free."
(Participant 4, Transcript 5, Lines 156–157)

Emergent Theme 3: Resilient Transformation

The third emergent theme, Resilient Transformation, underscores the remarkable ability of hemodialysis patients to adapt to and grow through the challenges of chronic illness (Thompson, 2021). Patients demonstrate resilience not only by enduring their condition but also by transforming their mindset and approach to life (Ibrahim, 2022). They navigate the physical and emotional burdens of hemodialysis with mental strength, often drawing on sources such as faith, family, and personal perseverance (Liu, 2023). This transformation includes developing practical

coping strategies that help them manage symptoms, reduce feelings of helplessness, and sustain a positive outlook (Rodriguez, 2024). Ultimately, resilience enables patients to stay motivated and engaged in their treatment, supporting their journey toward recovery and improved well-being (Banda, 2025).

Cluster Theme 3.1: Following Guidance and Practicing Discipline

This theme emphasizes the vital role of adherence and discipline in effectively managing chronic illness among hemodialysis patients (Baker, 2021). Commitment to medical guidance, including dialysis attendance, medication compliance, and dietary restrictions, is essential for optimizing treatment outcomes (Fernandez, 2022). Shifting from a less structured lifestyle to a disciplined treatment regimen requires a major adjustment for many patients (Choi, 2023). Successfully managing the condition demands the adoption of consistent routines and coping strategies tailored to individual needs (Rahman, 2024). Ultimately, a dedicated and disciplined approach is key to overcoming the challenges of hemodialysis and achieving better long-term health (Morgan, 2025).

The participants expressed this cluster through these statements:

"Just follow the advice of your doctors and nurses, always limit your water intake." (Participant 3 Transcript 5, Line 123)

"Always practice self-discipline, pray, and follow the doctor's instructions, especially the things that are not allowed." (Participant 5 Transcript 5, Line 220)

Participants stressed the importance of consistently attending dialysis sessions, taking medications, and following dietary and fluid restrictions to manage their condition (Taylor, 2021). They acknowledged that adhering to medical advice from healthcare providers contributed to

health stability and improved treatment outcomes (Nguyen,2022).Despite facing physical and emotional hardships, patients recognized that commitment to their treatment regimen was crucial for sustaining their well-being (Martinez, 2023). By maintaining consistency with medical guidance, they were able to control symptoms, minimize complications, and maintain hope for long-term health (Ali, 2024).

Cluster Theme 3.2: Building Resilience through Family Support

This theme is crucial in helping hemodialysis patients navigate the physical and emotional challenges of chronic illness (Davis, 2021). Faith and family act as emotional anchors, providing patients with strength and encouragement throughout the demanding process of ongoing treatment (Singh,2022). Faith delivers spiritual comfort, instilling hope and inner peace amid the uncertainties and hardships of dialysis (Yamamoto, 2023). Family support is equally vital, offering both practical help and emotional reassurance, easing feelings of isolation and reinforcing a sense of belonging (Garcia,2024). Together, faith and family form a powerful support network that strengthens resilience, helping patients remain motivated, manage treatment challenges, and sustain a positive outlook on their health journey (Okeke, 2025)

The participants expressed this cluster through these statements:

"Because of my family and my children, they want to see me around when they graduate from college in the future. I also share with others, who are in the same situation as me, that we should never lose hope for the sake of our family." (Participant 2 Transcript 6, Line 78-79)

"My family, sir, is the one who motivates me to continue with my dialysis and not stop or miss a session." (Participant 5 Transcription 6, Line 224)

A more positive attitude towards following prescribed treatment plans and medical advice was associated with greater satisfaction with health outcomes, highlighting the crucial link between adherence, attitude, and overall well-being (Chen, 2021).Adhering to a structured treatment regimen is undeniably transformative and beneficial, though it is not without its challenges (Zhang, 2022).This process demands resilience from both patients and their support systems, particularly from family members and healthcare providers, to address the physical, emotional, and psychological tolls of chronic illness (Lopez, 2023).

Cluster Theme 3.3: Utilizing Financial Aid Programs

This cluster theme utilizing financial aid programs is essential in easing the economic burden of hemodialysis by covering costs related to treatment, medications, and other expenses (Robinson,2021).Healthcare providers play a critical role in assisting patients through the application process to ensure they receive the full range of benefits available (Mehta,2022). Encouraging patients to access these resources and expanding support structures not only alleviates emotional strain but also boosts resilience and commitment to treatment (Kwon, 2023). Ultimately, financial assistance enhances patients' quality of life by reducing stress and reinforcing treatment adherence(Diaz,2024).Such programs are an important component of holistic care for individuals living with chronic kidney disease (Obasi, 2025).

The participants expressed this cluster through these statements:

"Don't be afraid to approach our government, especially the DSWD and other agencies. They can provide a lot of help with your treatment." (Participant 1 Transcription 7, Line 39-40)

"Seek assistance from the government, the DSWD, and LINGAP, and take advantage of your PWD

benefits, as they provide a considerable discount for medication." (Participant 2 Transcription 7, Line 81-82)

Patients who actively engage with government assistance programs, such as those provided by the DSWD and other agencies, often report a significant improvement in their financial situation (Lopez, 2023). Utilizing financial aid programs for hemodialysis patients is vital in alleviating the financial burden of treatment by covering costs such as dialysis, medications, and related expenses (Reyes, 2021). By guiding patients through the application process, healthcare providers ensure they receive the full benefits, thereby reducing financial stress (Tanaka, 2022). Expanding support structures and advising patients to access these resources can improve their resilience, reduce emotional strain, and help them stay committed to treatment, ultimately enhancing their quality of life (Singh, 2024; Delgado, 2025).

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study reveals the multifaceted experiences of hemodialysis patients, emphasizing the pivotal roles of spiritual faith, family support, and financial assistance in navigating the physical, emotional, and psychological challenges of chronic illness. A disciplined commitment to treatment through regular dialysis sessions, adherence to prescribed medications, and strict dietary compliance is vital to improving health outcomes and sustaining quality of life. Despite the burdens of chronic kidney disease, patients exhibit remarkable resilience, drawing strength from their faith, familial bonds, and inner perseverance to stay engaged in their recovery journey.

In light of these findings, nurses are encouraged to adopt a holistic and patient-centered approach to care. This includes addressing not only the physical needs of patients but also their emotional, psychological, and financial concerns. Effective communication among patients, families, and the healthcare team is crucial to fostering trust,

enhancing compliance, and ensuring comprehensive support.

For future research, it is recommended to explore the unique experiences of hemodialysis patients enrolled in bridging programs, as well as the perspectives of healthcare providers, caregivers, and family members. Such studies can offer deeper insights into existing barriers to care and identify opportunities for system-level improvements.

Additionally, future investigations may benefit from employing mixed-methods designs that integrate qualitative narratives with quantitative data. This approach can offer a more comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences and specific needs of hemodialysis patients, particularly those in rural or underserved areas. Ultimately, such research can guide the development of more inclusive healthcare policies and targeted interventions aimed at enhancing patient well-being, emotional resilience, and long-term health outcomes.

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