

# Kidney disease takes toll on area family

BY MICHELLE L. START  
Florida Weekly Correspondent

When Anice and Gilbert Haring decided to move from California to Fort Myers in April, they were full of hope.

They were raising grandchildren Sara, 10, and Alyssa, 5, and the girls' other set of grandparents wanted them close by. At 65 and 71 respectively, Anice and Gilbert Haring knew the move might be a financial strain, but they both planned to take part-time jobs.

However, those plans came to an abrupt halt when a tractor-trailer slammed into the side of their truck while the family was driving through Arizona. The truck rolled, nearly killing Gilbert Haring. His granddaughters looked on from a car that was following behind. He was rushed by helicopter to a trauma unit, where he racked up thousands of dollars in bills. While the couple does receive Medicare, their share of the hospital bill was \$44,000 and the helicopter bill was another \$13,000.

Gilbert Haring, a diabetic, already was having kidney problems. The trauma from the crash caused further damage and he is getting ready to start dialysis treatment. Anice Haring said her husband may need a transplant.

According to a report published in December in the Journal of American Medical Association, some 26 million American adults are living with kidney disease. Researchers estimate that 13.1 percent of all American adults have chronic kidney disease, up from 10 percent in earlier studies.

The United Network for Organ Sharing

lists nearly 98,000 people nationwide waiting for organ transplants, the majority of which need kidneys. The waiting list for kidneys was 74,162 last week with Florida residents listed as the seventh largest waiting population in the nation. Of the 3,715 people waiting for an organ in the Sunshine State, 79 percent or 2,931, need a kidney.

"We currently have 45 to 50 transplants a year that we do. We have 100 people on our waiting list for kidneys," said Dave Mainous, system director for renal services at Lee Memorial Health Systems. He works at Southwest Florida Regional Medical Center.

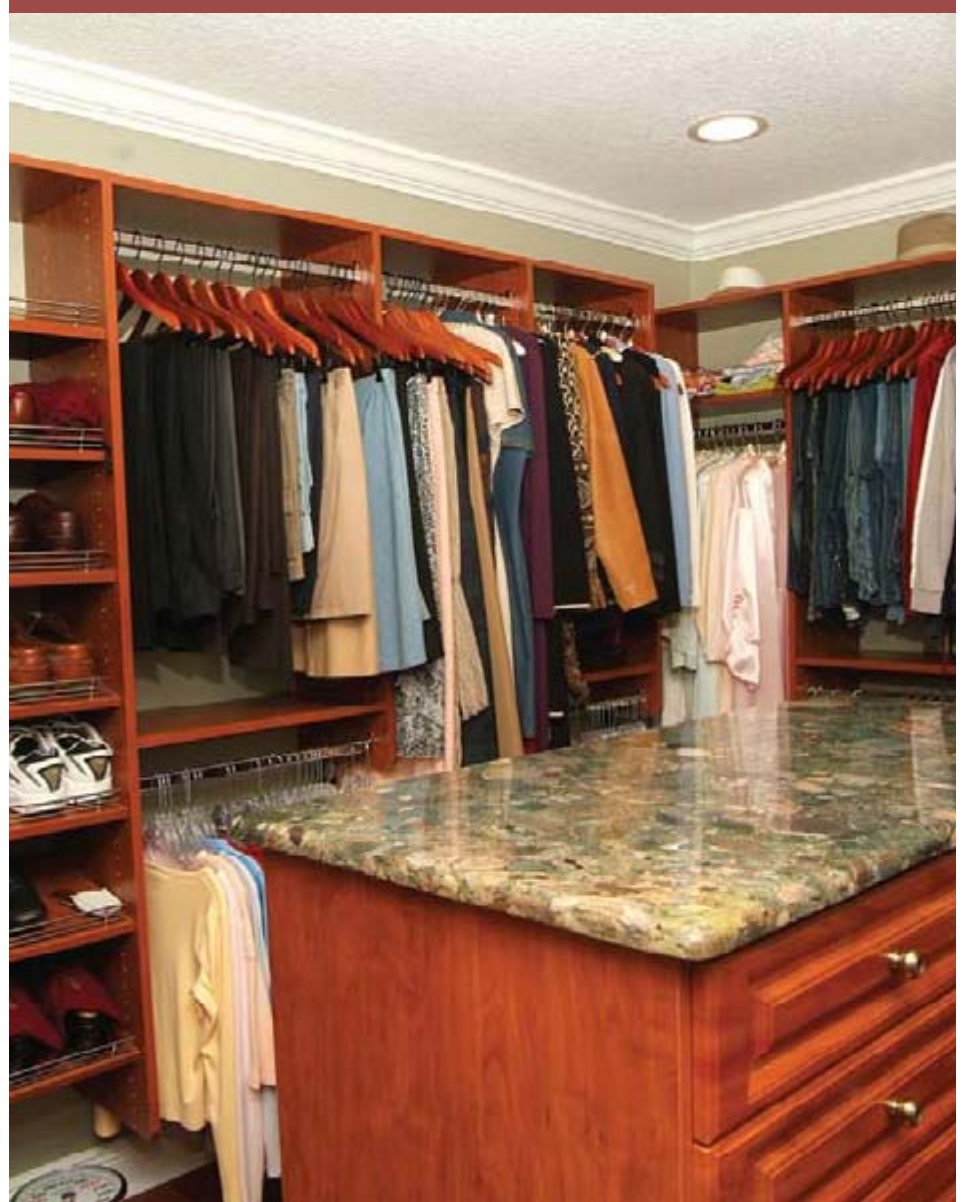
While those in renal failure qualify for help through Medicare, patients are still left footing 20 percent of the total bill. Mainous said most families have to resort to fundraising to offset the cost.

An actual kidney transplant costs \$175,000 to \$200,000 but there are also additional costs for medication, hospitalization and follow-up doctor visits. The Harings are already stretching every dollar that they receive from Social Security to cover their basic living expenses, which include \$1,100 a month for rent, previous medical bills from the crash and expenses associated with raising their granddaughters. The girls each receive \$120 a month from the state.

"One of the things that is really concerning me is paying the bills," said Anice Haring. "Answers are scarce right now. I would gladly go to work, but it's impossible with my husband in and out of the hospital and with trying to raise the girls. It is very difficult. I'm rationing, but we are really trying to get some help." ■

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