

## The Renal Business Beat

[PRINT](#)

Set out to change the lives of ESRD patients, WellBound, the Nation's first chain of home dialysis clinics, is offering education and training about chronic kidney disease and dialysis options.

By Bittina Larson, Nephronline.com Assistant Editor

A few years ago after noticing an unfulfilled need in the lives of people with CKD, Satellite Healthcare, which has been in the dialysis business for almost 35 years, decided to do something about it and created Wellbound, the company's CEO Marc Branson said.

WellBound's clinics, known as centers of excellence, not only offer training for the use of dialysis equipment, but also offer educational classes for patients in stage 4 of CKD, before dialysis is required. "After our renal replacement options workshops patients are fully informed to make a decision about their pending treatment," Branson said.

And a lot of these patients are making the choice to do dialysis at home. Dr. Ben Fritz, the medical director for WellBound's Santa Rosa, Calif. clinic shared statistics about home dialysis with Nephronline. "Somewhere close to 40% of patients will elect to do home dialysis after taking our classes, compared to the national average of 8 to 10%" he said. "This just shows that there is a big untapped demand of patients who need the right nurturing environment to make an informed decision."

More home dialysis can mean less reimbursement, especially when dealing with CMS. "CMS hasn't said they'll pay for 6-day-a-week dialysis," Fritz said. "And six times is common for home dialysis. Some treatments are getting reimbursed, up to four or five, but not all of them."

CMS might not come through for patients who select home therapy, but that is where WellBound steps in. "If WellBound doesn't get reimbursed, they don't get reimbursed," Fritz said. "We're here for the patients, not for money."

Electing a form of treatment is solely up to the patient and their personal comfort ability with the equipment. "WellBound does no steering toward any modality, we offer education on 'all flavors' of dialysis." Branson said. "We also work a lot with nephrologists in the areas where our clinics are, especially because some of our centers are joint ventures with nephrology practices."

Having a large center helps to drive the focus of home therapy. "Our clinics serve an average of 50 to 60 patients, compared to a major in-center dialysis chain which might serve a dozen home patients," Branson said. "In a major clinic, a proportion of patients that small doesn't usually get the focus of resources because resources are targeted at the majority [which do in-center treatment]."

WellBound, centered in California, recently opened its 11th and 12th clinics, including an expansion into Indiana and more are yet to come. "We have five more clinics in the pipeline, from looking at [future locations] to going through certification," Branson said. "One of our clinics is close to 120 patients, which shows how quickly we need to expand."

According to Fritz, "The bottom line is that patients are demanding more control over their treatments."

Next week: Addressing the change, life after in-center dialysis, patient and physician perspectives.