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BOB'S STORY

In his cover letter Bob wrote: "I suggest that NZAN make it an aim to distribute notices for display in as many doctors' waiting rooms and other health clinics as possible, explaining the symptoms of Addison's and advising those who suffer from the symptoms to see their GP and ask for a blood test for early diagnosis. I was very grateful for what the A&R Unit doctors did for me, and in turn they said that they were helped by the tests my GP had taken before I was admitted to hospital."

Jeanette replies: Your point is well taken, Bob. A flyer has been on our to-do list for a while, but we haven't quite got there yet. Some Addisonians look back with sadness and even some anger, at the time it took for their unwellness to be finally "believed", and the diagnosis established. However, in fairness, unless the more specific symptoms are present (in particular salt craving and an inappropriate degree of skin tanning and pigmentation in areas not exposed to the sun), the diagnosis can be challenging - and for the Addisonian, a miracle. In Bob's case, his GP was concerned at his high blood potassium level (and presumably also low sodium although he didn't say so to Bob), and advised Bob to increase his salt intake. But Bob didn't have a craving for salt.



Thank you for sharing your story, Bob, and please accept our very best wishes for a happy 80th birthday in September:

Indications that something was really wrong, started to show during 1999, when Bob was 78 years old. "I began to feel languid and to have a lack of interest in many things. I belonged to an indoor bowling club, and found that my quality of play had deteriorated. Before the end of the year, I began to get bent over, and as much as I tried, I could not walk as upright as I had previously.

"Things got gradually worse early in 2000, and I know that my daughters were concerned about me. I became afraid to drive, and relied on one of my daughters to take me on my doctor's visits, which were becoming frequent, and also to do my shopping. I thought I was becoming crippled up with arthritis. I fainted at home twice, and was taken to hospital for a check up.

"We discussed amongst the family that I should move into a rest home. An appointment was made for assessment. Then I was admitted to the Assessment and Rehabilitation Unit for further assessment. I was told next day that I had suspected Addison's disease,

and they were awaiting confirmation from blood tests. In the meantime I was put on a saline drip. After 24 hours of IV hydrocortisone in the saline, I felt really good. I looked better, and had colour back in my cheeks. The next day I was tried out on a walker and the doctors were very pleased that I could walk so straight and at a much improved pace than when I came in a few days before.

“I was kept in for a few more days stabilisation, and then went home feeling a new man, on top of the world. I felt so good that all the small chores about my home were no longer a bother for me. It felt wonderful to be able to live a normal life again. I even noticed my singing had improved when I sang the hymns in church.”

Bob explains that it hasn't been all plain sailing, however. After he'd been home for about three weeks, he had problems with fluid build up and needed hospitalisation. He has heart disease, and its medications, to deal with too. It has been a challenge to get the right doses of hydrocortisone and fludrocortisone to avoid fluid build up. He now takes 15mg hydrocortisone and 0.05mg Florinef daily, and frusemide diuretic to help counteract fluid retention. Leg ulcers that had been a problem over many years, healed once the Addison's medications were stabilised, although he needs to use a special ointment on the areas daily.

“I still drive, and I go for my re-licence in September. The plans for moving to a rest home are on hold for the time being.”