

# Dakota

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## *LVAD is Serious*

It all started about one year after I was released from the Toledo Hospital. I was there for treatment after a serious car accident on August 25, 2011. I had episodes that included stomach pain, nausea, dry heaving and heat flashes. Constantly, I was taken to U of M so they could try and figure out what was going on. They eventually diagnosed me with cardiomyopathy, which makes it hard for the heart to deliver blood to the body and can lead to heart failure.

The doctors thought that it would be best to have a pacemaker/defibrillator inserted. After that, I started to feel more like myself again. But that only lasted a short while and unfortunately the original symptoms started arising again. My doctors really didn't want to do any serious treatment, like surgery, right away but it eventually came to that point. Now I have an LVAD, a left ventricular assist device, which is used for patients who have reached end-stage heart failure. I had surgery for the LVAD in February 2015. It has made me feel so much better! I am able to do things I used to do, such as golfing, going on walks, shooting basketball and just hanging out with my friends without feeling sick the whole time. I felt so good that I started slacking on taking my medications and not going to my weekly blood draws. I hadn't felt that good in so long that I somewhat forgot that my condition was so serious.

On July 18th, during my 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday, my LVAD set off an alarm for HIGH WATTS. I tried telling myself that it was nothing and that I would be fine...but it continued to alarm. The next day, I decided to call the LVAD Emergency phone number and they told me to come right to U of M, as it was possible I had a blood clot in my pump...and they were right.

Shortly after being admitted to the CVC, they tried feeding me 'blood clot fighters' to destroy the blood clots but, unfortunately, it didn't work. My

surgeon informed that I did indeed have a blood clot in my pump BUT I also had blood clots in my heart. I would need a very serious surgery. There was no promise that I would make it through the surgery or that I wouldn't suffer from a stroke afterwards. I was scared out of my mind, I couldn't believe that I let this happen. I couldn't believe that my surgeon told me that he would 'try' to get me through this. I just couldn't believe anything that was going on.

Thankfully, I got through the surgery, but this recovery didn't go as smoothly. I suffered both acute kidney failure and acute liver failure. My body was also holding so much water that it got to the point that I was only allowed one liter of fluid a day because the doctors were afraid the excess water would cause me to have seizures. I remained in the hospital for more than 50 days.

This hospital stay was a turning point for me. I realized this condition was serious and that I needed to take control of my life and get my priorities straight. After FINALLY getting home, I made sure I took all of my medications daily, kept up on getting them filled at the pharmacy and went to get my blood drawn weekly.

Anything I was unsure about, I made sure to call the LVAD team to ask about it. Because I started making good and more responsible decisions, I am awaiting approval to be on the heart transplant list. I have started the process by taking my medications to prepare my body for a new heart. Finally, it's happening for me and I can't thank the heart team at U of M enough for everything they have done for me.