

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

'I'm praying I don't have to wait too much longer'

EMMA MOORE | 59 | HEART | Waiting since August

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When Emma Moore pictured retirement, it wasn't anything like this:

Days mostly spent indoors, watching TV and listening to the steady pounding of the machine that keeps her heart beating.

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Emma Moore points to the machine that pumps blood throughout her body and keeps her alive.

(Keith Hale/Sun-Times)

PHOTO GALLERY



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Not being able to travel the world with her girlfriends like she planned.

And waiting, anxiously, for the call from Rush University Medical Center that might not come in time.

She's been waiting for a heart transplant since last August.

Some days, the 59-year-old grandmother from East Garfield Park gets so discouraged she's tempted to unplug the machine that keeps her alive.

"You have those days when you're just tired, and you want it to be over," Moore said. "You don't care how. I'm just waiting -- hoping and praying I don't have to wait too much longer."

Moore's life-threatening heart disease was diagnosed five years ago. It was a shock for a woman who'd kept her weight and diet in check.

At the time, she was a child-welfare attendant for disabled students at Whitney Young High School. She had to take early-retirement last fall because walking even the short distance from one classroom to another had become too much for her weak heart. She'd suffered two mild heart attacks.

Last August, Moore was put on a device that connects to her heart's left ventricle, pumping blood throughout her body. Her doctors say she can stay on the machine for about a year. After that, she'll need a new heart.

The pump is attached to a five-pound battery pack that Moore straps on her shoulder. Not only is the machine noisy, but the bulky battery pack draws embarrassing stares and questions, too.

Once, a department-store employee accused Moore of stealing: He mistakenly thought the battery pack under her coat was stolen merchandise.

Most of the time, Moore avoids the hassles by staying home.

"You think: Your kids are grown, you're free. This is my time," she said. "Now, it's all up in the air."

Even if she were well enough to travel, Moore's not sure she could afford to now that her medical bills have eaten away at her retirement nest egg.

"I spend \$200 a month on medication, even with insurance," she said. "The house note, the utility bill -- everything's behind."

And with each passing month, she grows more convinced her prayers will go unanswered.

"It's been so long that I'm thinking this is not going to happen. People don't want to think about dying. But it's something you have to accept might happen."

Monifa Thomas

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To join the Illinois Organ/Tissue Donor Registry, visit Lifegoeson.com or call (800) 210-2106 and put your name on the confidential list, which is only released to organ and tissue procurement personnel and medical examiners after all lifesaving efforts have failed.

Gift of Hope, an Elmhurst-based non-profit, also answers questions about organ donation and gives information on how to become an organ donor at Giftofhope.org