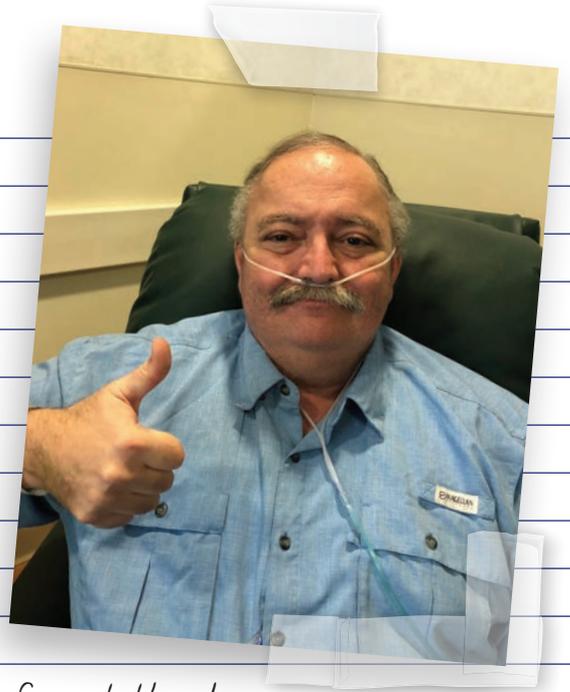


Dear HealthWell Foundation,

I want to thank you for providing me with a grant. Asking for help has never been easy for me. But today, I'm a 59-year-old retired firefighter with emphysema, hypercholesterolemia, symptoms of dementia, and multiple other health issues who has had to accept that I can't do this alone.



My Daddy used to say, "when you have your health, you have everything," and I now know how right he was. I'll never forget the day I nearly died in June 2009. I was coming across the parking lot to the fire station when my chest began to feel tight. By the time I got in the building, I was wheezing so hard I had to find a seat. The chief called for a medic and I was rushed to the hospital. That was the start of my health heading south. I spent that next week in the ICU and have been back in the ICU over 200 times since.

As a firefighter, I had pulled families from burning houses, extricated victims from car wrecks, and had to tell parents that their child didn't make it. Sadly, I've seen how things could turn upside down for people in the blink of an eye. But, when it happened to me, I had a really hard time accepting it.

My pride got to me and I didn't tell anyone what was going on even as it became financially devastating. I lost my house - I lost everything. The more I fought it, the worse it got. I had to make choices between eating and paying my insurance premium. When the minister at my church found out, he came over to me and said "Jim, that's why we're here!" For three and a half years, I had no income and leaned on my children, my church, and two dear friends.

I know now that there are people out there willing to help. That's how I found the HealthWell Foundation. When I was diagnosed with hypercholesterolemia - an abnormal buildup of plaque that restricts blood flow to my heart - my doctor suggested I call to see if I could get financial assistance so I could afford my medication. Mary, the woman who answered the phone the day I called, was so kind and patient. She broke everything down for me to make sure I understood. I was so happy when you all said "Yes."



I'll be honest, every day is a new struggle. But my daughter has blessed me with three wonderful grandchildren, and they have given me a reason to keep fighting. My doctors have all said my illnesses are a result of my days as a firefighter. I never smoked, but I have extensive damage from my lungs having been burned. I'm not angry, though. Even knowing what I know now, I would not have done anything different. It was an honor to serve the citizens of my community and I would do it all again.

If I had to give words of encouragement to anyone who is going through a health crisis, I would say be willing to reach out. Life can overwhelm you, especially when your health is failing. Take the time to befriend those in need and be prepared to help anyone. No one plans for this to happen.



I am so grateful to those who support HealthWell and to the caring staff, like Mary. This old firefighter thanks you for all you're doing to help people like me.

Jim P.  
Newport News, Virginia

Jim truly is a real-life hero -  
I'm so glad we could help him.  
-Krista