

For the little ones affected by kidney diseases, their futures would have been totally different if not for dialysis and a touch of human kindness.

MOHAMAD Safie, 14, is the youngest out of five children in his family to be diagnosed with kidney failure (at the age of nine). Two of his older sisters had kidney failure at an early age. One passed away due to other complications shortly after diagnosis at the age of four.

Life has indeed not been easy for the mother, Pn Jamilah, who has to travel frequently by public transport from Kuala Selangor to Hospital Kuala Lumpur for the children's treatment. The cost of treatment and travel (for the last 23 years) is also a burden.

Rajeswari Mathavanam was diagnosed with end-stage kidney failure at the age of five when her eyes and body suddenly swelled. Now at 10 years of age, a day in her life is like that of any other child except that she has to perform dialysis in a clean environment at the end of every day at 8.00pm.

Do you know that children can also suffer from end-stage kidney failure, even in their first year of life? Inherited diseases are the leading causes of kidney failure in children under age five.

In children aged 10-19, glomerular diseases are the leading cause of kidney diseases. Glomerular diseases occur when the filtering units (glomeruli) of the kidneys are damaged, causing blood and protein to leak into the urine.

Kidney problems also occur when the child is still developing in the womb - due to abnormal development of functioning units (nephrons) in the kidneys.

Children can be born with kidneys that are not normal and not able to function well. This may or may not be associated with obstruction of the urinary tract.

Other causes of chronic kidney diseases include urine reflux from the bladder back to the kidneys.

Symptoms and prevention

How does one know that a child is suffering from kidney diseases, especially when the child may not know how to convey the discomfort that he or she may be feeling?

"Be observant of your growing child to ensure that the growth is normal, that is, no stunted growth. Children grow fastest during the first two years of their lives.

"Children with kidney disease may also have swelling, especially around the eyes. Anaemia or inadequate red blood cells can be another symptom of chronic kidney disease," says Dr Lim Yam Ngo, a paediatric nephrologist and a board member of the National Kidney Foundation of Malaysia (NKF).

Dialysis for children

Chronic kidney disease, if severe enough, will generally lead to end-stage kidney failure, which will require dialysis. Peritoneal dialysis, which consists of the Continuous Ambulatory Peritoneal Dialysis (CAPD) and the Automated Peritoneal Dialysis (APD), are more common for children with kidney failure, compared to haemodialysis.

"Haemodialysis is not preferred because it requires the child to be at the haemodialysis centre for four hours three times a week. Children are also afraid of needles, which this method uses," says Dr Lim.

In CAPD, the patient has a catheter inserted permanently into the abdomen. Through this catheter, the abdomen is filled with dialysis solution. Waste products from the body will then be removed by the solution, which is then drained out after four to six hours and the abdomen is filled with a fresh lot of dialysis solution.

This process of exchange is performed by

Children with kidney diseases



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DR LIM YAM NGO



Above: Mohamad Safie, 14, was diagnosed with kidney failure at the age of nine. With him is his mom, Pn Jamilah.

In CAPD, the patient has a catheter inserted permanently into the abdomen. Through this catheter, dialysis is performed and it usually takes from 30 to 45 minutes each time and has to be done every four to six hourly, four times a day.

to attend school full-time and reduces the impact of dialysis on the family.

"It is more convenient for school-going children and working parents, who are unable to monitor their children four times a day like in the case of CAPD," Dr Lim continues.

"Children undergoing dialysis tend to develop low self-esteem, concentration problems and slow language and skills acquisition.

"Mother and child should be counselled, to address psychological issues, especially in preparation for what is to come.

"Mothers should learn about the disease and how to do the treatments. It is also important for mothers to share their experience with others," adds Dr Lim.

It is hoped that every child on dialysis will eventually receive a kidney transplant.

Kidney disease in children is less common than in adults.

However, one cannot help but feel sympathetic towards the little ones who are unfortunate enough to be afflicted.

Thankfully, there is dialysis to sustain their lives but it comes at a high cost. It is for this reason that the NKF has reached out to help support 21 children who are currently receiving treatment at Hospital Kuala Lumpur.

"NKF has a Children Dialysis Fund, which

aims to encourage organisations and individuals to contribute financial assistance to children with kidney failure, to give normal lives back to these little ones.

"Even if they contracted the disease at a very early age, they can still grow up to become adults. Help NKF in our various schemes to help kidney patients, especially the Children Dialysis Fund," says Dr SS Gill, Chairman of the Board of Managers of NKF.

■ This article is courtesy of NKF KIDNEY CARE, a community education programme by National Kidney Foundation of Malaysia. NKF provides subsidised dialysis treatments and free medications, laboratory tests, follow-ups and welfare assistance to NKF patients besides ongoing public education initiatives. NKF welcomes public donations to support its work. For more details, please contact NKF Hotline: 1300-88-3110. Website: www.nkf.org.my.



A day in the life of Rajeswari Mathavanam, 10, is like that of any other child except that she has to perform dialysis at the end of every day at 8.00pm.

one of the parents or another adult caregiver and it usually takes from 30 to 45 minutes each time and has to be done every four to six hourly, four times a day. This makes it inconvenient for children going to school and for parents who are both working.

"With APD, the dialysis starts at night and continues to work for 10 hours while the child sleeps. The APD method allows children