

# Dialysis deaths can be reduced

Some 20,000 end-stage renal patients are on dialysis and every year, at least 10 to 12 per cent of them die unnecessarily. ANNIE FREEDA CRUEZ talks to consultant nephrologist Dr T. Thiruventhiran on what should be done to reduce such deaths

**T**HE life span of patients receiving long-term dialysis for end stage renal disease (ESRD) can be increased — if only they take care to manage their diabetes, blood pressure, arrhythmia (irregular heart beat) and other heart problems.

Consultant nephrologist Dr T. Thiruventhiran said that it was sad that many patients on dialysis die every year because they did not manage infections and conditions such as diabetes.

There were 20,000 patients on long-term dialysis in Malaysia and of the number some 10 to 12 per cent of them die because of such co-morbid conditions and infections.

However last year, the death rate for those on peritoneal dialysis was 14.5 per cent and 9.6 per cent for those on haemodialysis.

Cardiovascular disease and death at home remained the common cause of death last year at 29 and 22 per cent, while death caused by sepsis (infection of the blood by bacteria after an operation or an accident) accounted for 17 per cent.

Dr Thiruventhiran said deaths could be reduced if doctors, nurses, technicians, dialysis managers, health-

care workers and family members knew how to care for ESRD patients on dialysis.

"These group of people must be kept abreast of the latest in the field, and on how to manage patients with co-morbid conditions."

He said many deaths were the result of complications caused by poor management of diseases that patients suffer from.

Patients on dialysis increased from 5,542 in 1999 to more than 17,015 in 2007 and almost 19,000 last year.

There are 485 haemodialysis centres and 31 peritoneal dialysis centres catering to 19,221 patients.

The Health Ministry provided dialysis to 32.4 per cent of patients, non-governmental organisations (29.9 per cent), and the private sector (36.3 per cent). Public sector dialysis centres provided care to 98 per cent of PD patients.

Dr Thiruventhiran, who is with the National Kidney Foundation (NKF), said there shortage of staff to care for kidney patients.

He said what was worrying



Dr T. Thiruventhiran (*inset*) says caregivers must be kept abreast of latest developments. ABOVE: Ten to 12 per cent of dialysis patients die from complications. These could be avoided if problems arising from dialysis are managed properly.

was the proportion of new ESRD patients caused by diabetes mellitus, which was steadily increasing every year.

He said people who care for ESRD patients should be aware of complications the patient could suffer arising from dialysis such as muscle cramps and hypotension

(sudden drop in blood pressure).

Side effects can be avoided through proper diet and taking medication.

Patients must also be careful with their diet as some may eat foods high in protein such as meat and chicken, while some may have differ-

ent potassium restrictions or may need to limit the amount they drink.

Some may even need to avoid salt or may need to limit foods containing phosphorus such as milk, cheese, nuts, dried beans and soft drinks.

Dr Thiruventhiran said

with proper care and management, patients could live longer and lead a quality life.

To further help increase the knowledge of people who care for ESRD patients, the NKF conducts yearly scientific meetings. This year it will hold the 7th NKF Annual Dialysis Meeting themed "Co-Morbidity in End Stage Renal Disease" from Dec 11 - 13 at Nikko Hotel, in Kuala Lumpur.

There will be talk on topics ranging from diabetes, blood pressure and infection control to influenza A (H1N1).

"Influenza A (H1N1) is new, and we do not know how this virus is going to affect patients on dialysis. We need to be careful that they don't get infected," he added.

"Infections are the second biggest problem among ESRD patients. Those involved with ESRD patients must take measures to prevent patients being infected with bacteria or virus related illnesses," said Dr Thiruventhiran.

The NKF's training centre also runs courses for those caring for ESRD patients.

Those who wish to attend the meeting in December may surf to [www.nkf.org.my](http://www.nkf.org.my) for details or call Nelly or Zai at 03-795 49048.