

Loving our kidneys

March 11 is World Kidney Day 2010. Go easy on your sugar intake to keep your kidneys healthy.



New National Kidney Foundation of Malaysia ambassador Datuk Chef Wan (middle) and National Kidney Foundation of Malaysia (NKF) board of managers chairman Datuk Dr. Datuk Dr. Zaki Morad Mohd Zaher (second from right) showing the press the World Kidney Day 2010 T-shirt. Also smiling for the camera are Dr. Sunita Bavannadan (far left), Dr. Philip N Jeremiah (second from left) and Dr. Ghazali Ahmad (far right).

By LIM WEY WEN

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AT the time when experts were still unsure of the reasons why people developed chronic kidney disease (CKD), the battle cry against the disease was simple. "Detect it early!" they said.

However, as more and more causes of CKD came to light, the list of things to do to prevent it got longer. Now, on top of getting your kidney health checked regularly, you've got to also keep your blood pressure, blood sugar levels, and body weight in check; and to do these, you need reduce your salt and sugar intake.

It sounds like a very long list, but as this year's World Kidney Day 2010 tagline ("Protect your kidneys - control diabetes") indicates, if there is only one thing you could do to keep your kidneys safe from harm, it would be keeping your sugar levels in check.

"The tagline is a wake-up call for everyone because diabetes represents the leading cause of CKD worldwide," said WKD 2010 organising chairperson Dr. Sunita Bavannadan.

Dr. Sunita was speaking at a press conference for the World Kidney Day 2010 along with Malaysian Society of Nephrology (MSN) president Dr. Philip N. Jeremiah, Ministry of Health national advisor and head of nephrology services Dr. Ghazali Ahmad, the National Kidney Foundation of Malaysia (NKF) board of managers chairman Datuk Dr. Zaki Morad Mohd Zaher and the new NKF ambassador celebrity chef Datuk Chef Wan.

We need not look very far for proof to verify Dr. Sunita's statement. In Malaysia, as many as 55% of all new dialysis patients in the country are diabetic, and many of these patients' lives have been greatly affected by multiple organ complications, and generally poorer outcomes on dialysis.

"The focus on diabetes mellitus this year reflects the importance of the disease from the perspective of nephrology, the branch of medicine which deals with the kidney and its associated disorders," said Dr. Ghazali Ahmad.

While diabetes affects many organs and systems in the body, one of its most important and potentially fatal target is the kidney.

When our blood sugar or glucose levels rise and our blood becomes more and more saturated with glucose, the glucose molecules will react with the proteins and lipids

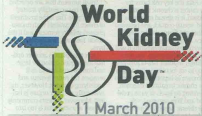
floating around them and set off a series of chemical reactions that can change the structure and function of proteins in the cells in our organs, as well as the cells lining our blood vessels and filtering units in the kidney.

Over time, these changes will damage the filtering units in our kidneys and they will slowly lose their function. Vital nutrients will be lost in the urine and waste products will start to collect in the blood, and if the kidney damage is left untreated, the kidneys may fail as a result.

That said, not all people with diabetes will develop kidney disease, said Dr. Ghazali.

"The likelihood of developing diabetic kidney disease depends on the presence of risk factors, including a family history of diabetic kidney disease, presence of hypertension, and the degree of blood pressure and blood sugar control, especially from the early stages of diabetes mellitus," he said.

So, if you are diabetic, and have family members who have diabetic kidney disease,



have hypertension, or have poor blood sugar level or blood pressure control during the early stages of the disease, you are at a higher risk of developing kidney complications.

However, as many people who have diabetes do not know this, they might be taken by surprise when their kidneys start to fail.

"Many diabetic patients with CKD present late to the nephrology service. And when they present in the late stage of CKD, some will even need separate for further delay in the anticipated dialysis treatment," he added.

As any delay in treatment may make the disease more difficult to treat and expose people who have it to other serious complications, people need to know that kidney disease is common, dangerous, but most importantly, treatable.

That is why, this year, the NKF, MSN, and Ministry of Health hopes that through its campaign it can raise greater awareness among the public of the dangers of diabetes and its link to kidney disease.

Although there is currently no studies to evaluate the effectiveness of previous cam-