

Take care of your kidneys

MILLIONS SUFFER FROM RENAL MALFUNCTION EVERY YEAR
AND IT IS ADVISABLE TO HAVE CHECK-UPS BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE

by S. Indra Sathiabalan

EVERY year, World Kidney Day (WKD) is celebrated on the second Thursday in March and this year it falls this week.

In Malaysia, the WKD celebrations will be a collaboration by three parties - the National Kidney Foundation of Malaysia (NKF), the Malaysian Society of Nephrology (MSN) and the Ministry of Health (MOH). They will be holding road shows throughout the country to encourage people to take the necessary steps in ensuring their kidneys stay healthy.

This year's theme is Amazing Kidneys - Are Yours Healthy?, which reflects on the vital roles this organ plays in our body, filtering 200 litres of blood each day as well as regulating blood pressure. High blood pressure is one of the leading causes of chronic kidney disease (CKD). That's why the tagline for this year's WKD is Keep Your Pressure Down.

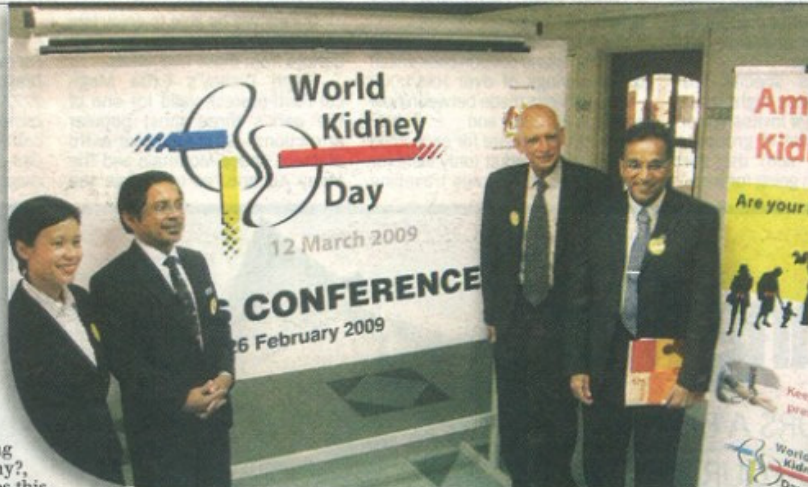
Incidentally, there will be a tie-up between WKD and World Hypertension Day (which will be held in May) this year.

"It is well known that patients with kidney failure generally have reduced life expectancy, suffer from higher risk of heart and blood vessel related diseases and higher risk of sudden death," said Dr Ghazali Ahmad, national adviser and head of nephrology, Ministry of Health during a press conference on World Kidney Day.

"In fact, the majority of patients with kidney diseases die from various heart and blood vessel related diseases before they reach the terminal stage of kidney failure which requires dialysis.

"It is for that reason that medical experts began recently to categorise kidney disease as an important and an independent cause of, and contributor to, cardiac and blood vessel related diseases.

"Diabetes mellitus and high blood pressure remain the two main causes of heart and blood vessel diseases. The former is the most common cause of terminal kidney failure in Malaysia while the latter is closely related to



(from left)
Dr Sunita Bavanandan, chairman of WKD 2009, Dr Ghazali, Dr S.S.Gill, chairman, board of managers, National Kidney Foundation of Malaysia and Dr Jeremiah.

kidney diseases."

Uncontrolled blood pressure can lead to kidney disease and subsequently kidney failure while kidney disease and kidney failure can lead to high blood pressure.

"In fact, by the time the kidney function fails and regular dialysis treatment is required, almost all such patients will have developed high blood pressure," added Ghazali.

For the WKD celebrations, several programmes will be implemented during the road shows to create public awareness on the need to have regular kidney health check.

"This is not so difficult as kidney disease can be diagnosed by simple urine and laboratory tests," said Dr Philip N. Jeremiah, president, Malaysian Society of Nephrology.

"Who are those that must be screened? First and foremost would be patients with diabetes and hypertension as these are still the most common causes of kidney failure. Other causes include those with autoimmune disease like SLE (systemic lupus erythematosus), those with frequent and recurrent urinary tract infections, urinary stones, family history of chronic kidney disease and those with a history of recovery from acute kidney injury," Jeremiah added.

According to preliminary data from the National Renal Registry, 4,071 new patients commenced dialysis last year. Current

figures (as of December 2008) reveal that there are 18,789 dialysis patients.

The most important aspect of this campaign is to remind people that prevention is better than cure. If the kidney problem is at its early stages, your doctor can help you with various treatments.

Ghazali mentioned that most people aren't even aware that they have kidney disease or kidney failure as there are barely any noticeable symptoms. So urine tests are needed to measure the amount of protein and detect the presence of abnormal cells. Protein in the urine is not a normal occurrence and therefore is an indication that the organ is not working properly.

The WKD nationwide campaign and road shows kicked off on March 6 in Kangar, Perlis. On March 12, WKD 2009 will be officially launched by Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai, the Minister of Health at Hospital Serdang in Selangor.

Apart from the road show, a NKF Family Day will be organised on March 29 for all NKF Dialysis patients in Klang Valley at the Sunway Lagoon Theme Park.

For more on World Kidney Day 2009 activities and road shows, call the NKF hotline at 1300-88-3110 or log on to www.nkf.org.my.