

Employ more kidney patients

THE National Kidney Foundation of Malaysia (NKF) was pleased to read about an employer who employs patients on haemodialysis (*The Star*, Aug 10).

We commend Wan Zaidon Wan Hassan for his efforts to help patients on dialysis treatment.

We appreciate the efforts by Socso in encouraging employers to return kidney failure patients to gainful employment.

We at NKF have been advocating and promoting this for years. We ourselves have employed some of the patients dialysing at our centres.

There are now over 28,000 patients on dialysis and 49% of them are in the employable age group of 25-54.

Even among those above the age of 55, who incidentally form the fastest growing dialysis population in the country in recent years, many are keen and suitable for part-time work.

There is a perception among most employers that those with end stage kidney failure can no longer

work because of their ill-health.

Some sympathise with their employees and feel that continuing to employ them will worsen their health.

In many other situations, employers find that supporting an employee on dialysis is costly and thus terminate his employment.

Dialysis performs many of the vital functions of the kidney and returns the individual with kidney failure to a fairly normal physiological state which enables him to live reasonably well enough to undertake the activities of daily living, including working.

There are some caveats to this: he has no other organ complications such as heart failure, he dialyses religiously as prescribed by his doctor, follows a strict dietary regime and takes his medications regularly.

Dialysis treatment schedules may impact his work, but with some planning, this can be minimised.

Individuals on haemodialysis have their treatment three times a

week on either Monday-Wednesday-Friday or a Tuesday-Thursday-Saturday schedule.

About 15% of dialysis patients are on Peritoneal Dialysis, a form of dialysis which is home-based, self-care treatment and this modality of dialysis has less impact on their working hours.

While getting a job will improve the financial status of the individual and his family, we, at NKF view employment as part of the overall care and rehabilitation of the individual.

Those who look after these individuals often sense despair, despondency and low self-esteem in them.

Soon after being diagnosed of a major organ failure, they find themselves out of a job. They become dependent on their families for financial support, when once they were the breadwinners.

A number of studies done overseas and here has documented a high prevalence of depression amongst dialysis patients. Getting a

job will restore their self-confidence and self-esteem and motivate them to look after their health better.

The NKF hopes that there will be more people like Wan Zaidon who will employ dialysis patients who are keen to work.

NKF will be more than happy to assist employers who have reservations about employing kidney patients.

For the past 10 years NKF has been conducting annual forums for patients on how to get assistance for dialysis treatment from various agencies such as Socso, Pusat Zakat and Baitulmal.

The main objective of these initiatives is to help kidney patients return to work and lessen the financial burden on them and their families.

They just need the opportunity to work and be financially independent.

DATUK DR ZAKI MORAD MOHD ZAHER, Chairman, National Kidney Foundation of Malaysia