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MANSOR/THE SUN  
Etienne (right) checking his motorcycle with Torriero (left)

## 30,000km ride to raise awareness on kidney disease

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**PETALING JAYA:** Australians Stephano Etienne and Paul Torriero are men on a mission. Over a period of three months, they will be blazing across 30,000km and four continents on their motorcycles, all to raise awareness about chronic kidney disease (CKD).

The epic journey, which began on July 24 in Sydney and will end next month in Paris, has its roots in Etienne and his wife's struggle to cope with the news that their baby boy Ilhan, now 16 months old, was diagnosed with underdeveloped kidneys at birth.

"He had three surgeries in the first five days of his life," said Etienne, who said learning how to cope with a problem rarely seen in children made finding a support network that much harder.

The challenges, however, inspired the seeds of an idea that has led to the creation of the WorldRiderz foundation early this year, an ambitious undertaking to harness popular support for the cause, televising one man's mission to spread awareness and set up the Global Renal Network (GRN).

Etienne and Torriero arrived in Malaysia from Australia on Aug 25 and spent nine days here, travelling to Kuala Lumpur and Malacca to speak about WorldRiderz is all about.

"The GRN is a work in progress and will be an online sharing

platform for both medical professionals and individuals," he said during a visit to the National Kidney Foundation (NKF) headquarters here.

"The purpose of the Worldriderz foundation is two pronged: firstly, we want to create awareness about the disease, and secondly we are building contacts to add to the GRN database."

Discovery Channel is filming this epic journey and will follow Etienne, accompanied by his best friend Torriero, as they travel in their KTM990 Adventure bikes through Australia, Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Europe, building bridges with hospitals, medical centres and health professionals to add on to the GRN network.

National adviser and head of

Nephrology Services at the Ministry of Health Datuk Dr Ghazali Ahmad said the TV series being created was a great way to raise awareness about the disease.

"In Malaysia, we have about 20,000 patients on dialysis, it's not cheap and can cost up to RM200 per session," he said at a press conference at the NKF.

NKF chairman Dr Zaki Mohd Zaher said awareness was essential in reducing the number of people who end up with end stage CKD because as early detection could help mitigate the situation.

"Early stage symptoms are mild however, so people need to be aware of how important regular screenings for the disease are if you are in a high-risk group which includes anyone who suffers from diabetes,

hypertension and or has a family history of the disease," said Zaki.

Although CKD is uncommon in children, it is estimated to be prevalent in about 10% of the world's population.

Every year, another 4,000 new patients need to go for dialysis treatment and it is estimated that there are currently over 20,000 dialysis patients in the country.

The creation of GRN is promising not only for the support base it will provide for

families coping with the disease, (not least families with children who suffer from CKD for which there are nearly no existing support forums), it will also be useful in the medical research arena.

"The network will facilitate the efficient and rapid dissemination of the latest research within the medical world," said Etienne.

"The funds generated through traffic to our website will also go towards research being undertaken in Australia.

"The network will also provide space for a 'wish list' for doctors to have a say in what research we direct the funding to." The WorldRiderz left for New Delhi, India on Sept 3.

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