

Sharing costs to treat B40 kidney patients with anaemia

THE National Kidney Foundation Malaysia (NKF) is raising public awareness of its Red Bean Assistance Programme to alleviate the economic burden of chronic kidney disease (CKD) patients with anaemia, especially those in the B40 group.

The programme in collaboration with Roche Malaysia started in August last year.

Based on a study in 2018, the prevalence of CKD in Malaysia is 15.48%, with around 50,000 patients undergoing dialysis treatment nationwide.

Most dialysis patients have anaemia (deficiency of red blood cells) which gets more severe as the disease advances.

Kidneys make erythropoietin (EPO) that stimulates the body to make red blood cells.

This EPO level is reduced among those with damaged kidneys, leading to anaemia.

CKD patients also lose blood during haemodialysis treatments, further reducing the haemoglobin level.

The Red Bean Assistance Programme aims to help CKD patients with severe anaemia by providing partially or fully-funded Erythropoietin-Stimulating Agent (ESA) treatment.

ESA, an innovative monthly medication, signals the bone marrow to produce more red blood cells and simplifies renal anaemia management for patients.

“Kidney patients need long-term

treatment and the cost to sustain dialysis is high, especially for those with renal anaemia.

“While the financial burden is difficult to bear for most patients, the hardest hit are those from the low-income group,” said NKF chairman Datuk Dr Zaki Morad.

“NKF provides support and treatment at its 27 centres nationwide with more than 1,700 dialysis patients to manage.

“Through this programme, the cost of the patient’s ESA treatment is co-shared between the patient, NKF and Roche,” he added.

The Health Ministry has in the past lauded the programme, stating that it would help meet the needs of kidney patients.

The programme is expected to benefit more than 600 patients during the first year and a further 1,000 people over the next two years.

Patients will be assessed by a qualified nephrologist for eligibility before they are referred to the nearest NKF dialysis centre or other suitable dialysis centres.

Upon approval by NKF, the assistance will last for a year, with a review at the end for renewal.

Kidney failure patients, whether on dialysis or not, and including non-NKF patients from government hospitals, private and dialysis centres run by NGOs, are eligible to apply for the programme through NKF centres nationwide.

For details, go to www.nkf.org.my or call 03-7954 9048 ext 218/207.