

# Webinar highlights how early detection can halt kidney disease

KHAIRUL Syazwali Taib was in the prime of his life and physically active.

He played rugby and ran half-marathons.

An episode of gout prompted him to take a blood test and it was then that he was diagnosed with polycystic kidney disease (PKD), a genetic condition that causes numerous cysts to grow in kidneys.

“My kidneys were failing, only functioning at 9%,” the 35-year-old said, recalling how devastated he was on learning this.

It is not uncommon to have PKD for years without being aware of it.

It is known to develop even in patients between 30 and 40 years old.

National Kidney Foundation of Malaysia (NKF) notes that though Malaysians may be aware of the seriousness of chronic kidney disease (CKD), many may not be getting annual screenings to ensure good kidney health.

CKD, because it is symptom-free in its early stages, is often missed.

However, with early detection and when managed properly, the rate of deterioration in kidney function can be reduced by as much as 50%.

It may even be reversible.

Khairul Syazwali shared his CKD journey at a “MyBuahPinggang” webinar in Kuala Lumpur recently.

Panellist Dr Lily Mushahar, nephrologist and internal medicine specialist at Tuanku Ja’afar Hospital, Seremban, described CKD as a silent killer with little or no warning signs until the later stages.

An annual blood test (renal function test) or urine test (to detect protein or blood in the urine) is crucial for early detection.

“Most CKD cases (65% to 70%) are from among diabetic patients, yet there are others who get it even without any real symptoms,” she said.

Globally, Malaysia has been reported as having the second-highest incidence rate of kidney failure affecting young adults.

As of 2018, the prevalence rate of CKD in Malaysia stood at 15.48% compared to just 9% in 2011.

Khairul Syazwali underwent dialysis and later, a successful kidney transplant, thanks to his older brother who donated a kidney.

“I was really surprised and overcome with joy and gratitude when I discovered from my doctor that my brother had stepped forward to be an organ donor,” he said.

A kidney transplant is still the most effective and preferred treatment for end-stage renal disease (ESRD) patients, offering patients like him the possibility of a longer and better quality of life, as well as lower healthcare costs.

Yet another worrying trend is the low rate of kidney transplants in Malaysia — three per million population (pmp), compared to

Spain (62 pmp) and Thailand (nine pmp).

Under the National Action Plan for Healthy Kidneys (ACT-KID) 2018-2025, the government aims to increase the rate of local kidney transplants to five pmp in three years.

The waiting game for kidney recipients in Malaysia is also unnerving as organ donation rate for transplants in Malaysia is among the lowest in the world.

Another lifeline for CKD patients waiting for transplant is dialysis.

It is the only active treatment choice for some 98.7% of patients with ESRD.

Haemodialysis pumps blood out of the patient’s body to an artificial kidney and returns the blood via tubes connected to the machine.

NKF has been providing haemodialysis treatment to CKD patients nationwide for over 30 years.

A major stumbling block facing healthcare professionals in the

battle against CKD is the danger of disinformation.

This is alarming since as many as 50,000 CKD patients in Malaysia undergo dialysis, with a significant number from underprivileged sectors.

To counter this, the public could visit MyBuahPinggang.com, which provides accurate, practical medical information that is easily understood by the masses, said Dr Khairul Hafidz Alkhair, chairman of Medical Tweet Association Malaysia.

The association developed the website with Health Ministry and Universiti Putra Malaysia’s nephrologists.

The site addresses issues particularly pertinent to CKD patients in Malaysia.

There is also NKF’s Community Organ Donation Drive (Code): Life book titled *Masih Ada Yang Sayang*, an anthology of anecdotes drawn from the experiences of CKD patients and nephrologists in Malaysia.