

Kidney transplant subsidy to help needy Malaysian patients: NKF

KUALA LUMPUR: The National Kidney Foundation (NKF) of Malaysia has introduced a kidney transplant subsidy to help underprivileged patients with a monthly household income of below RM1,800.

The subsidy will cover various costs from pre- to post-kidney transplantation including income loss replacement for the work-up and recuperating period for patients seeking transplantation procedures at a government hospital.

According to NKF chief executive officer Khor Xin Yun, the aid accounts for the many costs that are prevalent in the process of transplantation which can discourage organ donors and patients from following through, especially for those that are underprivileged.

"With over 8,000 Malaysians being diagnosed with kidney disease annually, it's imperative that we help facilitate transplantation to the best of our ability."

The subsidy will cover costs for all the necessary pre- to post-surgery medical examinations, travelling expenses, lodging, subsistence and income loss.

Khor said many factors are related to the expenses for a successful kidney transplant.

"NKF facilitates the non-medical aspects towards a successful kidney transplant and follow-ups based on needs."

"This excludes the kidney transplant surgery in the private medical centres and immunosuppression drugs where the government hospitals are able to provide for it."

She, however, noted that no limit is set for eligible patients.

"The subsidy will be based on qualifying criteria and needs as put forth by the referring nephrologists."

To apply for the programme, the consultant nephrologist from a government hospital will refer and recommend a patient along with a detailed medical summary and a list of items required for the subsidy.

The process is to ensure only patients who truly require assistance qualify and that the subsidy is applied to necessary costs.

Khor said the evaluation process would take up to 10 working days once all required documents are in order.

The subsidy is only for those who seek transplant procedures at government hospitals. Those who wish to have their surgery done at private healthcare can only apply for a pre-surgery subsidy.

"There are instances where a nephrologist can refer a patient to a private hospital for pre-transplant screening and work-ups under the subsidy on the basis that government and university hospitals do not have the capacity to tend to said patients."

"However, the subsidy does not include the cost of surgical fees, as government hospitals have the capacity to perform kidney transplant surgery and provide immunosuppression therapy," said Khor.

She also noted that as of now no limit is set for the number of patients who can receive the subsidy to ensure more deserving kidney patients receive financial aid for their transplant procedure.

"Additional budget will be requested if there are more demands with the programme. The goal is to remove the financial barriers for the poor and deserving who choose kidney transplants as the renal replacement therapy option."

Speaking about kidney transplantation cost, Khor said such procedures at private hospitals come with a hefty price tag.

"The surgical cost itself may cost up to RM30,000 or more, not including other costs such as pre-transplant work-ups and post-transplant continuation of care."

"The costs may differ between private hospitals."

She said medical treatment at government hospitals is heavily subsidised, hence, the out-of-pocket payment for patients on treatment and hospitalisation is generally small.

Khor, however, said the waiting time for kidney transplant surgery is around three months due to delays in the pre-kidney transplant work-up.

"With NKF kidney transplant subsidy, we hope to assist in expediting the pre-kidney transplant work-up and evaluation by funding the work-ups." - MM