

Prevention, early detection vital in curbing renal disease

SHAH ALAM: Kidney disease in Malaysia demands urgent attention through earlier detection, wider community screening and more sustainable treatment approaches, National Kidney Foundation Malaysia (NKF) board member Dr Sunita Bavanandan said.

Speaking at the national-level World Kidney Day 2026 celebration, she said kidney health must be viewed as a shared responsibility that extends beyond individuals to society and the environment.

“This year’s theme, Kidney Health for All – Caring for People, Protecting the Planet, highlights the need for a holistic approach to healthcare that safeguards both patients and the environment.”

Sunita highlighted that kidney disease continues to have a severe impact on Malaysians, often going undetected until its later stages, when treatment becomes more complex and costly.

“Many patients are only diagnosed at the final stage, when kidney function is already critically impaired. This places a heavy burden not only on patients, but also on their families,” she said, stressing the importance of prevention and early

detection.

Since 2008, more than 600,000 individuals have been screened through NKF programmes nationwide. The foundation is now focusing on targeted screening, particularly among high-risk groups such as those with diabetes, cardiovascular disease, hypertension and the elderly.

She also outlined several key initiatives undertaken by NKF, including a strategic collaboration formalised in February between the Health Ministry, NKF and 12 NGOs to strengthen prevention and early detection of non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

The collaboration includes aligning community screening programmes with the National Health Screening Initiative (NHSI), improving referral pathways for at-risk individuals and enhancing the use of data to monitor and improve healthcare delivery.

“So far, screenings have been carried out in 43 localities, reaching nearly 2,000 community members in the initial phase,” she said, adding that efforts will be expanded to more areas alongside volunteer training and improvements in referral

systems.

Another major initiative is a memorandum of understanding between NKF and the Malaysian Society of Nephrology (MSN) to support early diagnosis of rare kidney diseases, ensuring patients receive timely and accurate treatment.

Sunita added that NKF is also working to transform kidney replacement therapy by promoting peritoneal dialysis (PD) and organ transplantation, while expanding infrastructure to meet rising demand.

Plans include establishing four new PD training centres in Perlis, Kedah, Sabah and Sarawak, opening a new haemodialysis centre in Batang Kali, Selangor and developing integrated dialysis centres in Sabah offering haemodialysis, PD and counselling services.

Meanwhile, MSN president Prof Dr Lim Soo Kun emphasised the growing importance of sustainable healthcare practices, particularly in dialysis treatment.

He noted that haemodialysis is highly resource-intensive, with each session using an estimated 250 litres of water.

With about 50,000 haemodialysis

patients in Malaysia, this translates to roughly two billion litres of water used annually.

“That amount could supply a lifetime of drinking water for tens of thousands of people,” he said, underscoring the urgency of adopting more sustainable practices.

Lim said the MSN has introduced a green nephrology initiative, including a position statement to guide more sustainable dialysis and kidney care practices in Malaysia.

The approach focuses on prevention, reducing resource wastage, improving energy efficiency and managing clinical waste responsibly.

“However, sustainability must always go hand in hand with patient safety, quality of care and equitable access.”

Lim stressed that chronic kidney disease often develops silently, making early screening and timely intervention crucial – particularly for high-risk groups.

He highlighted the importance of public education initiatives, including forums on emotional wellbeing, nutrition and treatment care, held in conjunction with the event. – By **Kirtinee Ramesh**