Protecting kidney health through prevention, early detection, and innovation

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Kidney disease is often called a “silent killer” because many people do not realize they have it until significant and sometimes irreversible damage has already occurred. As the country observes National Kidney Month, it is important to remember that chronic kidney disease (CKD) is a growing public health concern that affects millions of people worldwide and places an increasing burden on patients, families, and healthcare systems. Yet with greater awareness, early detection, healthy lifestyles, and continued medical innovation, many cases can be prevented or managed effectively.



According to the World Health Organization (WHO), kidney disease occurs when the kidneys can no longer effectively remove waste products and excess fluid from the bloodstream. Chronic kidney disease is a long-term condition that typically develops gradually and is often irreversible. The severity of CKD can range from mild kidney dysfunction to complete kidney failure, a condition that may require dialysis or kidney transplantation to sustain life.

Although relatively small in size, the kidneys perform several essential functions that are critical to survival. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) notes that the kidneys filter all the blood in the body approximately every 30 minutes, removing waste, toxins, and excess fluid. They also help regulate blood pressure, signal the body to produce red blood cells, support bone health, and maintain the balance of important chemicals in the bloodstream.

Kidney disease is associated with substantial illness, disability, and premature death. The WHO highlights that kidney disease is closely linked with cardiovascular disease, serving both as a cause and a consequence of heartrelated conditions.

The burden of kidney disease in the Philippines continues to grow alongside rising rates of diabetes, hypertension, obesity, and cardiovascular disease. These conditions are among the leading drivers of chronic kidney disease and contribute significantly to healthcare costs, lost productivity, and reduced quality of life. Because CKD often progresses silently, many patients are diagnosed only when the disease has reached advanced stages, limiting treatment options and increasing the likelihood of costly interventions.

Several factors can contribute to the development of CKD. Common causes include diabetes, high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, inflammation of the kidney's filtering units, genetic conditions, infections, and exposure to certain medications or toxins.

One of the challenges in addressing CKD is that many people do not experience symptoms in the early stages of the disease. The CDC emphasizes that individuals with CKD may feel completely well, making regular screening particularly important for those at higher risk. The only reliable way to detect CKD is through blood and urine tests.

Beyond affecting kidney function, CKD can lead to a range of serious health complications. According
to the CDC, these may include anemia, increased susceptibility to infections, abnormal levels of calcium, potassium, and phosphorus in the blood, reduced appetite, depression, diminished quality of life, and a significantly increased risk of heart disease and stroke.

The good news is that many cases of kidney disease can be prevented or managed through healthy lifestyle choices and proper medical care. The WHO recommends regular physical activity, maintaining a healthy weight, avoiding tobacco use, and adopting healthy dietary habits to reduce the risk of CKD. For people living with diabetes, hypertension, or cardiovascular disease, controlling blood sugar, blood pressure, and cholesterol levels is particularly important.

The CDC further advises individuals to keep blood pressure below 140/90 mm Hg, or according to targets recommended by their healthcare provider. Those with diabetes should strive to keep blood glucose levels within their target range. Smoking cessation is also crucial, as smoking can worsen kidney damage and reduce the effectiveness of medications used to control blood pressure.

Primary care plays a critical role in the early detection and management of kidney disease. The WHO advocates integrating kidney health into primary healthcare systems, particularly through routine testing for individuals with diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular disease. Early diagnosis allows healthcare providers to initiate interventions that can slow disease progression, reduce cardiovascular risks, and prevent complications.

For people diagnosed with CKD, treatment focuses on preserving kidney function for as long as possible and improving quality of life. Management strategies may include medications, lifestyle modifications, nutritional counseling, and regular monitoring.

Encouragingly, advances in medical science are transforming the way kidney disease is prevented and treated. New medicines have demonstrated the ability not only to help control diabetes and blood pressure but also to slow the progression of chronic kidney disease and reduce cardiovascular complications. Improvements in diagnostic tools and risk assessment are likewise helping healthcare providers identify patients earlier, when interventions can have the greatest impact.

A healthy lifestyle remains one of the most effective ways to care for the kidneys. Individuals are encouraged to eat a balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat dairy products while reducing salt and added sugar intake. Regular physical activity, maintaining a healthy weight, getting adequate sleep, managing stress, limiting alcohol consumption, and avoiding tobacco use all contribute to better kidney health and overall well-being.

The International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers and Associations (IFPMA) recognizes that kidney diseases are intricately connected to other noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), including diabetes, obesity, liver disease, and cardiovascular conditions. Despite their widespread

impact, kidney diseases often receive less attention than other major health challenges. This highlights the need for a more integrated approach to NCD prevention and management that recognizes the significant impact of kidney disease on individuals, families, and health systems alike.

Protecting kidney health requires action at every level. Individuals must adopt healthier lifestyles and seek regular screening, particularly if they have diabetes, hypertension, or cardiovascular disease. Healthcare systems must strengthen primary care and expand access to early diagnosis and effective treatment. Policymakers, healthcare professionals, patient groups, and industry must continue working together to ensure that innovation reaches those who need it most. By prioritizing prevention, early detection, and timely intervention, we can help more Filipinos avoid kidney failure, improve quality of life, and live longer, healthier lives.

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