

# World Kidney Day 2022

## Theme ‘Kidney Health for All’

### Focus: Bridging the knowledge gap to improve kidney health through increased kidney-care education and awareness in the public arena

World Kidney Day 2022 is declared the year of ‘**Kidney Health for All**’ to promote global teamwork in order to advance strategies and to bridge the gap in kidney health education and literacy. Health literacy involves more than the functional abilities of an individual; it is also the cognitive and social skills needed to gain access to, understand, and use information to manage health conditions. In this case – *kidney disease*.

Most people do not know what kidneys are for, or even where their kidneys are.

Kidney organisations are working towards shifting the patient-deficit health literacy narrative to being the responsibility of health-care providers and health policy makers. By engaging in and supporting kidney health-centred policy making, community health planning, and health literacy approaches for all, **the kidney communities strive to prevent kidney disease and enable living well with kidney disease.**

For those afflicted by kidney disease and the subsequent effects on overall health, effective health-care provider communication is required to support individuals to understand what to do, to make decisions, and to take action.

Chronic kidney disease (**CKD**) refers to a condition where kidneys have been damaged over a period of time and gradually lose their function. This makes it difficult, and eventually impossible, for the body to carry out its function without the crucial role played by the kidneys. Kidney failure refers to the advanced stage of CKD where the function of the kidneys falls below 15% and the body is sick.

#### 1. Why do we have kidneys?

- Kidneys are vital organs.
- The main functions of the kidneys are to
  - get rid of excess water from the body;
  - excrete waste products;
  - balance acids, buffers, and salts;
  - regulate blood pressure; and
  - make hormones responsible for bone health and the production of red blood cells.

#### 2. How would I know that I suffer from CKD?

- Kidney disease is a **silent killer**.
- In the early stages, there may be no symptoms.

- Most of the time, the symptoms are experienced when the kidney function has decreased severely and is usually unlikely to reverse.
- Common symptoms:
  - Swelling – may affect the face, legs, or even the whole body
  - Tiredness
  - Itching of the skin
  - Shortness of breath
  - Poor appetite, nausea, vomiting

### **3. What are the common causes of kidney disease?**

- Hypertension
- Diabetes mellitus
- Some infections, such as HIV
- Glomerulonephritis
- Use of medications that harm the kidneys, such as some traditional and over-the-counter medications
- Some kidney diseases are inherited
- Obesity
- Excess alcohol intake
- Smoking
- Kidney stones
- Repeated infection of the bladder and kidneys

### **4. Can CKD be treated?**

- Some causes of CKD can be treated, if detected in time.
- Lifestyle changes, such as consuming a low-salt diet, maintaining a normal weight for the height, exercise, and avoiding habits that may be harmful to the kidneys, such as smoking and consuming of excessive amounts of alcohol, may slow the progress of CKD.
- Kidney transplantation is the most cost-effective way to treat kidney failure. However, access to this form of treatment is limited due to the shortage of suitable donated organs globally.
- Dialysis therapies are blood-purifying techniques used to keep the patients alive while waiting for kidney transplantation.
- Dialysis therapies are expensive and not widely available in the South African state-funded healthcare system.

### **5. As an ordinary citizen, what should I do to contribute towards this cause?**

- Screen for kidney disease; this is recommended for all population groups at risk.
  - All adults should go for a routine medical check-up at least once a year, where they are screened for high blood pressure, diabetes, and HIV infection.
  - All persons with high blood pressure, diabetes, and HIV infection should be screened for kidney disease.
- Maintain a healthy lifestyle and normal weight by consuming a calorie-controlled, balanced diet and exercise regularly.

- Avoid repeated use of over-the-counter/herbal medication, smoking, and limit alcohol intake.
- Equip yourself with knowledge regarding kidney disease.
- **Be an organ donor**
  - In case you die while your vital organs are still in good condition, it can be used to save the lives of patients who need organ transplantation, such as the kidneys, heart, lungs, liver, cornea, skin, etc.
- Support those with kidney disease and their families.
- Promote kidney health education and literacy to the general population.

**6. How can I be an organ donor?**

- a. Register as an organ donor at [www.odf.org.za](http://www.odf.org.za)
- b. Inform your next of kin and family that you are an organ donor; preferably document this in your will to ease the process of consent.
- c. Keep the 'donor card' in your wallet or record it on your smartphone medical information for easy access.