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Treating kidney disease early could help reduce deaths from heart disease

Targeted screening and treatment of kidney disease could help reduce the number of deaths from heart disease and strokes, according to the Kidney Alliance, a group representing patient and professional organisations.

The Kidney Alliance is using World Kidney Day, on 10th March 2011, to raise awareness of the fact that people diagnosed with Chronic Kidney Disease are at increased risk of suffering from cardiovascular disease (CVD), and the risk rises as the kidney disease worsens. Early diagnosis of kidney disease can improve outcomes for patients, and help ease the financial burden on the NHS. However, kidney disease is usually 'silent', showing no specific symptoms until it becomes more advanced; screening is often the only way the disease can be detected in its early stages. If diagnosed early, **kidney disease can often be successfully managed through medication and lifestyle advice**, delaying or preventing a move to dialysis. If diagnosed late, renal failure is complex, challenging and expensive to treat.

As Dr Richard Fluck, President-Elect of the British Renal Society, says: "Screening for kidney disease is extremely simple, requiring a blood test to measure kidney function, as well as a test to measure the amount of protein in the urine, as increased levels indicate kidney damage. **People at high risk of CVD, such as those with diabetes or high blood pressure, should be screened routinely.**"

It is believed that between 3 and 5 million people in England have some level of kidney damage, and although only a small proportion of these require dialysis and transplantation, the cost of these treatments accounts for around 2 per cent of the total NHS spend.

Cardiovascular disease kills around 200,000 people in the UK every year and costs the NHS nearly £15 billion annually

To ensure that kidney care is identified and managed, **it is vital that GP consortia**, once they are fully operational, **ensure that they have the right mix of skills** to identify patients at the critical early stage. This needs to be supported by appropriate specialist teams, providing care to the more complex cases. The Alliance believes that, as the NHS undergoes change, dialysis and transplantation must remain a nationally commissioned specialised service. Kidney patients need to know that skills will not be lost and that consistent and high quality treatment will be supported and improved throughout the National Health Service.

"Screening for kidney disease is still not the norm for all those at risk. We need to change this, increase detection and raise awareness of kidney disease, especially for those with heart or circulatory problems, or a family history of kidney disease. **As a kidney patient, I**

want to know that fewer people are moving onto dialysis, but I also need to know that there is an integrated service available for those who do need it“, comments Fiona Loud, Chair of the Kidney Alliance.

Dr Abraham Abraham, kidney doctor from Aintree University Hospitals, adds “Increased screening for kidney disease is a win-win situation. Early diagnosis and treatment can help prevent people developing heart problems and save them from a life on dialysis. More than ever before, it is vital that we ensure every penny spent in the NHS counts, and this is the perfect opportunity to streamline costs while improving patient outcomes.”

For more information and details of local activities running all over the UK to support World Kidney Day – please see www.worldkidneyday.co.uk

Ends

Notes to editors

Kidney Alliance

The Kidney Alliance is an umbrella group of patient and professional organisations working in renal care - it aims to promote prevention and early identification of kidney disease and high quality treatment for all patients at risk from or identified with kidney failure on an equal and uniform basis throughout the UK. Members include: Association of Renal Industry, Association of Renal Managers, British Association for Paediatric Nephrology, British Kidney Patient Association, British Renal Society, British Transplant Society, Kidney Research UK, National Kidney Federation, Renal Association, Renal Nutrition Group, Royal College of Nursing.

World Kidney Day

World Kidney Day is a joint initiative of the International Society of Nephrology (ISN) and the International Federation of Kidney Foundations (IFKF). It is celebrated every year on the second Thursday of March in more than 100 countries on six continents. It is supported by the renal community and its various organizations in the UK through the Kidney Alliance.

World Kidney Day exists to raise awareness about the importance of our kidneys – an amazing organ that plays a crucial role in keeping us alive and well. The kidney is often overlooked as an organ that is vital to life and good health. Yet the cost of renal replacement therapy (RRT) for total kidney failure weighs heavily on many health care budgets. Over 1.5 million individuals around the world receive dialysis or have had a kidney transplant. In the UK one person dies every day waiting for a transplant.

Cardiovascular Disease – disease affecting the heart and blood vessels

Chronic Kidney Disease – long standing, often irreversible damage to the kidneys