

CONNECT

1.5 Million Life-saving Dialysis Treatments Delivered

During Covid-19 Pandemic



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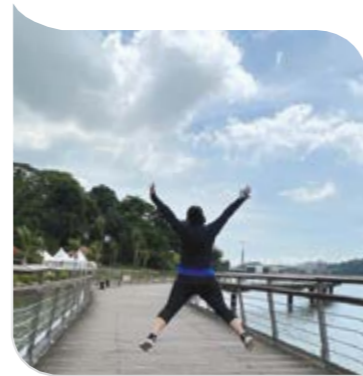
LIFE-SAVING CARE

A flexible lifestyle

Ms Irene Tam has been suffering from kidney disease since she was a teenager. In early 2021, she was told by her doctor that her condition had worsened...

A selfless act of humanity

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COVID-19 SPECIAL FEATURE

NKF plays critical role in delivery of essential dialysis

For two years and eight months during the Covid pandemic, NKF spared no effort in ensuring kidney failure patients continued to receive safe and crucial life-saving dialysis treatment...



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DAILY DOSE OF HEALTH

The unsweetened truth about diabetes

“Eating too much sugar causes diabetes.” How many times have you heard of this misinformation?

The Covid-19 pandemic has posed huge challenges for everyone. Nevertheless, all of us at NKF have put in our best to ensure that dialysis patients, especially with their weaker immune systems, receive uninterrupted and safe dialysis treatment and care. As a tribute to our 1,000-strong team, we have chronicled in this issue their journey as they worked tirelessly from February 2020 to September 2022 to carry out our mission-critical work and delivered 1.5 million life-saving dialysis treatments. While we are deeply saddened to have lost some along the way, we have emerged stronger and more resilient to better serve dialysis patients in future crises. We are immensely grateful and thank you for your unwavering support during this tumultuous time.

As we move towards endemic living, investing in our health is crucial – all the more so as kidney failure cases are rising at an alarming rate in Singapore, and we see a “kidney tsunami” coming. About six people are diagnosed every day, a three-fold increase from two decades ago. NKF has over 5,300 dialysis patients – about 60% of the total dialysis patient population in Singapore. Diabetes remains one of the leading causes of kidney failure. With World Diabetes Day falling on 14 November every year, it is timely to remind ourselves to lead a healthy lifestyle to prevent diabetes. One in three individuals is at risk of developing diabetes in their lifetime. In *Daily Dose of Health*, we share with you the importance of cutting down on your sugar intake and going for regular health screenings, as well as tips to nip diabetes in the budding stage of pre-diabetes and lower your risk of diabetes.

In *Life-saving Care*, you can read the story of Ms Irene Tam, who chose peritoneal dialysis (PD) so that she can do her treatment in the comfort of her home while sleeping with the help of a PD machine, rather than going to a dialysis centre for thrice weekly haemodialysis treatments. With PD giving her more flexibility, she is able to work full-time, support her 86-year-old bedridden mother, enjoy outdoor activities and spend quality time with her friends for a more fulfilling life.



In this segment, we also highlight the heart-warming story of the brave and selfless Madam Norhayati, who gave her brother-in-law one of the greatest gifts of life – a kidney. She hopes that by sharing her story, it will debunk the myths about kidney donation and encourage others to also come forward to donate. A kidney transplant offers the best solution to kidney failure, and gifts the recipient a better quality of life.

As you may have noticed, we have revamped our newsletter such that it encapsulates our focused role in providing sustainable dialysis through viable treatment alternatives, helping patients to take ownership of their health, and empowering the community to lead healthy lives through our kidney awareness and prevention efforts. As you read the stories in this brand-new edition, we hope that you feel the impact of your support in transforming lives. We look forward to journeying on with you in giving life and hope to dialysis patients and the wider community. ■

Tim Oei
Chief Executive Officer



Read online
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Giving and growing with NKF

Mendel started his volunteering stint with NKF as a student representative in 2018. Then, he led his cohort of club mates to befriend patients at one of NKF's dialysis centres on a weekly basis. A natural leader, he is currently sitting in the NKF Volunteer Committee as Logistics Manager. Here, he shares his experience of volunteering with NKF and how he finds it fulfilling and meaningful.

When our student group first signed up as volunteers, we were introduced to the Kidney Discovery Centre which highlighted the different stages of kidney failure and how they occur. It was an enriching experience as we learnt how prevalent kidney failure can be and some of the challenges and restrictions that NKF patients face. This motivated me to be more involved in NKF's cause as it aims towards the betterment of these dialysis patients.

One of the most memorable volunteering experiences is hearing the life experiences of patients, which often provides us with a different perspective on certain social issues around us. It is indeed inspiring to see patients' great fighting spirit and positive outlook towards life despite their condition. There are also patients who take their own time to help and encourage their fellow patients.

"The antidote to negativity isn't positivity, it's warmth". This was a quote I came across some time ago, which resonated deeply with me as it does spotlight the attitude we should have towards some of the dialysis patients. There are some days where the patients are having a hard time either at



Mendel conducting a tour at the Kidney Discovery Centre for new volunteers

work or home and feeling down. Although some may appreciate words of encouragement or advice, most of them are just looking out for a listening ear. Therefore, you need not worry about whether you have the best advice or solution for their problems, as what they need is just your time and patience to listen to them. ■

"Volunteering with NKF has not only been an eye-opening experience but also an enriching one. NKF will deepen your understanding of kidney health, which you can then advocate to those around you and thus prevent kidney failure."

Mr Mendel Seah
NKF volunteer

"As I found out more about NKF's role in the community and society, I found greater purpose in being part of the KWCLR movement to raise awareness about kidney health. Volunteering with NKF has broadened my horizon; I've learnt how important health is, especially our lifestyle and diet."

Ms Cristabel Yeo
NKF volunteer



With passion comes a great online renal community

She is not just any youth. She is one with the heart and skills for volunteering. Twenty-year-old Cristabel Yeo has been volunteering with NKF since 2021. Under Cristabel's management, the Kidney We Care; Let's Revolutionise (KWCLR) IG page achieved an impressive engagement number that was over 250,000 during the annual event held in March this year. Not only did Cristabel plan and execute marketing strategies during the event period, she also created most of the content on the page. Despite her being very much behind the scenes, she is passionate about harnessing the power of social media to advocate the importance of kidney health to fellow youths in the community.

What started as an interest in social media management and content creation for Cristabel then, ended as a deepening love for giving back to the renal community with the skills she possesses.

"Learning about NKF's support for kidney patients has motivated me to be more active and provide support in any way I can," said Cristabel. "I continue volunteering with NKF because of the opportunities given – such as the platform and creative freedom to help raise awareness for a meaningful cause." ■

A flexible lifestyle

Ms Irene Tam has been suffering from kidney disease since she was a teenager. In early 2021, she was told by her doctor that her condition had worsened and her kidneys were failing, and that she required dialysis to sustain her life.

Her dialysis treatment options

Irene had two options – peritoneal dialysis (PD), a home-based treatment, and haemodialysis (HD), in which she would have to visit a dialysis centre thrice a week and spend four hours each time hooked up to a dialysis machine. For PD, there are two types. One is Automated Peritoneal Dialysis (APD), where a tube (catheter) is inserted in the abdomen. A special sterile solution enters the abdomen through the catheter and circulates there, drawing out impurities. The fluid is drained out by a machine into a bag while the patient sleeps at night, and this procedure is carried out daily. The other is Continuous Ambulatory Peritoneal Dialysis, which is a machine-free, gravity-based exchange – typically four to five exchanges per day.

No problem adjusting to PD

The 51-year-old, who works as a customer service professional, chose the former as it would not affect her work and earning capacity. It also allows her to have more time to support her 86-year-old mother, who is bedridden.

To Irene, the APD machine is synonymous with a new loyal “boyfriend” of hers that accompanies her every night while she undergoes nine hours of dialysis, helping to remove toxins, extra salt and fluids from her body.

“At the beginning, I was taught how to use the PD machine,” says Irene. “It’s quite straightforward and not complicated. I also needed to make some adjustments like how to take care of myself to minimise infection and what I should and should not eat. After that, no problem.”

Receiving support

To support PD patients like Irene, NKF provides subsidies and has a PD Community Support Programme that trains patients so that they can carry out the treatment at home on their own, and are clear about managing risks of infection, proper diet and medication.

The NKF PD nurse makes regular home visits to Irene’s home to ensure that she is doing well. In this way, knowledge gaps are filled so that she is empowered to live a quality life.

Irene also joined NKF’s PD Support Group, which helps equip patients with better health literacy, alleviate psychosocial issues and enable bonding among patients. “In the group, we share our experiences, encourage and support one another. We have all gone through similar worries and challenges so we understand each other. It’s therapeutic.”

Happy with her flexible lifestyle

Irene is now doing well in her treatment and rehabilitation and is able to do sporting activities that she loves like playing badminton, cycling, sailing, hiking and bowling.

“With PD giving me more flexibility, I’m able to work full-time, take care of my bedridden mother, enjoy outdoor activities and spend time with my friends. I still can have a quality and fulfilling life.” ■



Irene Tam and her mother

“With PD giving me more flexibility, I’m able to work full-time, take care of my bedridden mother, enjoy outdoor activities and spend time with my friends. I still can have a quality and fulfilling life.”

Ms Irene Tam
PD patient





PD is painful as needling is required.

MYTH

(no vascular access and needling are required and, hence, painless)

The efficacy of PD and quality of life of patients depend on many factors, such as the presence of multiple medical conditions, the patient's lifestyle and proper adherence to the treatment regimen.

FACT



- PD -
MYTH
or
FACT?



A patient on haemodialysis (HD) has no chance to switch to PD.

MYTH

(if a patient on HD is medically suited for PD, it is possible to switch to PD)

PD is gentler and, hence, fewer food restrictions and side effects.

FACT



(PD mimics the function of real kidneys more as the constant presence of the PD solution in the abdominal cavity allows waste products to be removed continuously. The non-intermittent nature of PD makes it a gentler treatment.)

A selfless act of humanity



Roslan (left), together with Taufik, Norhayati and their son

"I wanted to give him back his life. He was constantly in pain and agonising over his fate. He had lost all hope to live."

And this healthy and happily married mother of five young boys did just that when she gave her brother-in-law one of the greatest gifts in life – a kidney.

Living donor transplant the best option

It all started in 2017 when Mr Roslan Bin Saydeh, then 57, shockingly found out that he had kidney failure due to years of having diabetes, and had to start dialysis to sustain his life. He felt his whole world come crashing down.

His doctor told him that having a kidney transplant from a living donor was the best treatment option, as he could enjoy a better quality of life and a longer life expectancy than those dependent on dialysis. A newly transplanted kidney can almost completely replace the lost functions of the failed kidney, allowing the patient to live life normally.

When he mooted this option to his immediate family members, they willingly volunteered to donate one of their kidneys to him without hesitation. After they underwent several tests, his younger brother, Mr Mohd Taufik, was found to be a suitable match. Roslan was ecstatic and looked forward to leading a fulfilling and meaningful life. □

“No words can express what my wife did for my brother. It was a life-changing experience for all of us.”

Mr Mohd Taufik, who is grateful to his wife for her magnanimous act

Double setback

But things did not turn out as planned. Before the transplant could take place, Roslan had to undergo an angioplasty due to a heart condition. He fully recovered six months later after his successful surgery. His hopes were up again, and he was once again looking forward to having his transplant.

As fate would have it, he faced another major setback. Taufik, who needed to go for a re-test, was found to have a high blood sugar level and it was risky for him to undergo a transplant operation. Roslan was devastated. His hopes and dreams were dashed. He was disheartened as he could not come to terms with having to undergo lifelong dialysis. He wanted to give up on life. His anguish and misery were also taking a considerable toll on his family.

A saviour

In the midst of uncertainties and trepidation, a saviour emerged in Roslan's life. Taufik's wife, Madam Norhayati Mohd Ali, then 39, could not bear to see her brother-in-law suffer physically, emotionally and mentally. She felt that she had to do something and mulled over giving her kidney to Roslan. She shared her thoughts with her husband and mother. With their blessings, she gallantly stepped forward to offer her kidney to Roslan. After several tests, there was good news – Norhayati was a suitable match. She underwent a thorough process in order to be cleared for the transplant surgery, including being prepared psychologically.

“After the time when I was found to be a suitable match, many questions started running through my mind like ‘will I be able to lead a normal life after the transplant?’” said Norhayati. “But after receiving counselling and reassurances from the transplant doctor, my fears and doubts were allayed.”

“If your loved one is suffering from kidney failure and you know you can give, why not? You are giving someone a chance to have a better quality of life.”

Madam Norhayati, who gave her brother-in-law the gift of life by donating her kidney to him

“I am no longer bogged down with the need to undergo dialysis treatment. I am indeed grateful to Norhayati for giving me this new life. It was a brave and selfless act.”

Mr Roslan, who is enjoying a new lease of life after the kidney transplant



Support from NKF

The successful transplant took place on 15 January 2020. Norhayati and Roslan are thankful that they are able to benefit from NKF's Kidney Live Donor Support Fund, which helps defray the cost of post-transplant expenses like medical check-ups and medication.

Both donor and recipient doing well

Roslan is feeling much better after his transplant. With proper care, diet, regular screenings at the hospital and timely medication, Roslan is keeping well. He exercises on the treadmill, goes for brisk walks, brings his wife for check-ups on her spinal problem at the hospital and helps look after his four grandchildren. He is enjoying his new lease of life.

“I am no longer bogged down with the need to undergo dialysis treatment,” said Roslan. “I am indeed grateful to Norhayati for giving me this new life. What she did was a brave and selfless act.”

For Norhayati, her life has not changed. She has resumed her normal routine as a homemaker soon

after the transplant. She manages the day-to-day running of the household and takes care of her family's needs, especially that of her five young children. She is happy and healthy as ever and hopes that her gift of life will spur others on to come forward to give their kidney to those in need.

“If your loved one is suffering from kidney failure and you know you can give, why not?” said Norhayati. “You are giving someone a chance to have a better quality of life.” ■

Did you know?

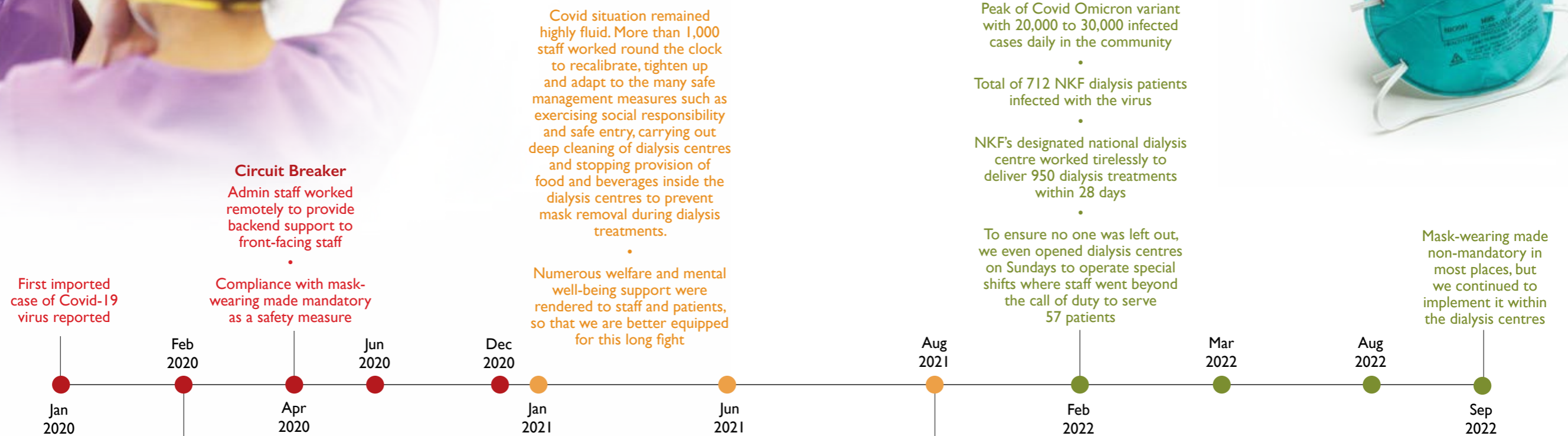
- An individual can lead a normal life with one kidney!
 - Donors can have a regular diet with no specific restrictions generally. However, they are advised to keep to a balanced diet and regular exercise to keep fit and healthy.
 - Kidney donation does not affect fertility. Post donation, female donors can undergo successful pregnancy.
- Patients may have to wait up to 9.3 years for a kidney transplant from a cadaveric (deceased) donor. However, if a patient with kidney failure is able to find a living kidney donor among their loved ones, they can significantly reduce the waiting time.
- I can eat anything I want after a kidney transplant
In general, kidney transplant patients' diet is not that different from an average healthy person. However, as they are required to take anti-rejection medications for a lifetime – which can reduce immunity and increase their susceptibility to foodborne illnesses – certain food that can interact with the medications or may contain bacteria has to be avoided. This will reduce the potential risks of infection and kidney rejection.

Transplant recipients are advised to consult their doctor and dietitian about their diet post-transplant.



NKF plays critical role in delivery of essential dialysis

For two years and eight months during the Covid pandemic, NKF spared no effort in ensuring kidney failure patients continued to receive safe and crucial life-saving dialysis treatment and care in an uninterrupted way, as the consequence of missing dialysis would be deadly. The whole 1,000-strong NKF team worked tirelessly and steadfastly from Feb 2020 to Sep 2022, and delivered more than 1.5 million dialysis treatments.



DORSCON Orange Business Continuity Plan (BCP) activated to ensure continuity of care delivery

- Multiple safe management and infection control measures were put in place
- Staggered patient dialysis timings implemented to avoid cross contamination
- NKF staff split into different teams for better emergency response
- Telemedicine and telecare introduced to limit cross institutional movement of personnel and ensure patient care was not disrupted with concerted and coordinated efforts between NKF and hospitals

Safe Reopening (Phase 1, 2 & 3) Jul 2020

We stepped forward to serve as a national centre for all dialysis patients under quarantine

Dec 2020

National vaccination rolled out to protect everyone against the disease, and minimise the risk of transmissions and severity of symptoms

Covid cluster at Upper Boon Keng dialysis centre emerged. NKF worked with the Ministry of Health to monitor the situation closely and ensure that the necessary safety and precautionary measures were taken to curb further transmission. All possible support and assistance were provided to the patients and their families.

All dialysis patients required to perform Antigen Rapid Test (ART) before entering the dialysis centres to minimise risk of the virus transmission

Transition Phase to Covid-19 Resilience

National centre continued running to serve patients in need, with more than 2,800 dialysis treatments carried out



COVID-19 SPECIAL FEATURE



Living with Covid has been especially challenging for dialysis patients and their families due to their weaker immune systems. What is more worrying is that if they are infected, they would likely require intensive medical care as many also have underlying medical conditions. There was no room for relaxation of any safety and precautionary measures. We are proud that we have made it. We lost friends and comrades, but we have emerged stronger with many lessons learnt. It gave us an opportunity to rethink our fundamentals while unlocking new possibilities to serve and protect our patients in future crises.

Serving as a national dialysis centre to care for all dialysis patients

While we remained agile in providing uninterrupted dialysis treatment to our patients at all our dialysis centres, we continued to stretch ourselves to support Covid-19 dialysis patients from different dialysis providers. When there was a shortage of slots in the national dialysis centres, NKF staff turned things around quickly to treat patients in their original dialysis centres and even responded selflessly to the call to serve on their non-working Sundays and operate special dialysis shifts, so that no Covid-19 dialysis patient was left out.

Over 2,800 dialysis treatments carried out to support Covid-19 dialysis patients nationally.

Safeguarding patients with stringent safety measures

We continued to calibrate our safety measures in accordance with the Ministry of Health's guidelines to ensure that our infection control measures remained at the highest standard, and that we were quick to adjust to the necessary changes to processes, procedures and the work environment to ensure continuity of care to our patients.

Ensuring continuity of patients' care needs through Telecare and Telemedicine

We continued to reach out to patients through telemedicine and telecare as and when needed, while we progressively resumed with face-to-face care and consultation so that patients' care needs are not disrupted. NKF's team of doctors, nurses and allied health professionals continued to journey with patients by adopting this hybrid approach in providing all-round quality care to meet patients' medical, nutritional and psychosocial needs in these extraordinary times.



1.5 million

Total number of life-saving dialysis treatments delivered over 2 years & 8 months during the pandemic

46%

Almost half of our patients, 2,012 of them, had been infected with the virus, and we were saddened to lose 57 lives despite our all-out efforts to safeguard them

\$500,000

To tide patients and family members through difficult economic times of the pandemic, about half a million dollars worth of food vouchers were provided

303

Total number of volunteers mobilised at dialysis centres islandwide to assist with in-centre duties and render care. We are deeply grateful for their compassion and dedication.

“At the time when the Covid-19 situation was constantly evolving, as an infection control nurse, we were always on high alert in getting the situation under control and planning for worst-case scenarios, so as to minimise infection risk to patients and staff within the dialysis centres.”

Ms Faezah Binte Mohamad Adam, Nurse

“You cannot control what life throws at you, good or bad. But you can control your attitude towards what happens to you. Meditation, my family and peer support are my guiding light, helping me to stop worrying about things I cannot control.”

Mr Shashitharen Ambalaka, who has been practicing mindfulness meditation on a daily basis after his stroke attack, which helps to clear his mind. In the absence of the regular physical interaction brought about by the Covid-19 situation, we reached out to patients who may be at risk of social isolation and loneliness, and kept them engaged for their physical and mental well-being by initiating a Mindfulness Meditation Support Group.

“Every day was a challenge. I need to plan, coordinate and make sure that my team and I were able to deliver vital medical supplies to the dialysis centres.”

Mr Nor Azhar Othman, who is part of the logistics team



Ms Sandra Song (middle in blue), with friends and nurses at the dialysis centre

Inspired to pay it forward

It is said that acts of kindness ripple through time. This holds true for Ms Sandra Song, who has been supporting NKF for years. In particular, she has donated monthly towards the NKF A.K. Giver Programme, which supports patients with dialysers – also known as artificial kidneys (A.K.). Sandra also volunteered at the dialysis centre with her friends in a befriending session, where interactions with patients help meet their psychosocial needs, which is an important part of the holistic care they require to live quality lives.

Sandra has always greatly admired her late mother-in-law, Madam Wong Sui Ha Edna's compassion, generosity and willingness to give to others. While executing Madam Wong's will after her passing, she was inspired to continue Madam Wong's legacy of helping needy dialysis patients.

Aside from doing her part for charity through the A.K. Giver Programme, Sandra is also a firm believer of sharing the joy of arts with the community, especially the more vulnerable groups. As the Chairman of Xin Yue Performing Arts, she has invited patients and their families, staff and donors to watch traditional Yue Opera performances put up by their arts group in various years. During the recent Covid-19 pandemic, Sandra and her friends also hand-made reusable masks, which were put up on NKF's eShop to help raise funds for patients and distributed to front-liners in this trying period.

Through these contributions, Sandra hopes that more people in the community will be inspired – just like her – to step up and help dialysis patients, empowering them with the opportunity to continue leading fulfilling lives. ■

"I've seen for myself how patients suffer by having to undergo dialysis treatment for the rest of their lives. Long-term support is therefore crucial to ensure the continuity of dialysis treatment and care for them. I'm glad to do my bit through my monthly giving to provide artificial kidneys (dialysers) for needy kidney patients."

Ms Sandra Song Lee Giok

Did you know?

What is A.K. Giver Programme?

- Haemodialysis (HD) patients go to dialysis centres for treatment 13 times a month and they will have to do so for the rest of their lives. For each dialysis treatment, they depend on an Artificial Kidney (A.K.), to filter waste and excess fluids from their body. A.K. are meant to be used only once and will be replaced after every treatment.
- The A.K. Giver Programme helps raise funds to support patients with A.K.s that are crucial to the sustaining of their lives. Every \$100 can support a patient with A.K.s for one month, and every \$1,000 can support a patient with A.K.s for 10 months.
- Haemodialysis (HD) is performed thrice weekly, with each treatment being about 4 hours long. HD patients spend 624 hours every year on dialysis.
- At every HD session, 2 needles will be inserted into the patient's vascular access. This amounts to 312 needles being inserted in a year.





A tough but fulfilling job

“Being a social worker indeed gives me the privilege to help patients and their families navigate through tough decisions and impact their lives in a positive way.”

Ms Melissa Tan
Social worker at NKF for the past five years

Social worker, Ms Melissa Tan, 32, spends her days walking alongside, and connecting with, dialysis patients and their families who face many daunting challenges due to a debilitating disease – kidney failure. Here, she reflects on the challenges she faces in helping patients who are not having their best days in life, and shares her joys and heartbreaks in this chosen, yet demanding profession.

My inspiration

I grew up with my parents always telling me to help others within my limits and educating me that ‘Helping is a Virtue’. And my late father’s medical social worker made me certain that I wanted to be like her. She was my inspiration and that led me to be a social worker and uphold the values that I strongly believe in – of having compassion and perseverance.

Daily work and challenges

I help patients on the road to rebuild their lives. I journey with patients and their families, provide psychosocial assessment and counselling, connect patients to community resources and organise group work programmes to promote their social well-being. I work hand in hand with the multidisciplinary team of medical and allied health professionals to educate and influence patients to improve their quality of life and daily functioning, and empower them to take ownership of their treatment by coming up with an individualised care plan, as every patient’s condition is different.

There are patients who do not open up to social workers, not wanting to acknowledge our presence, let alone share their problems with us. There are times when I even get shouted at. There is also the language barrier, as different patients speak different languages or dialects. Patients’ and family members’ perspectives may also differ, and that is when I will have to end the session and revisit them after some time. Human relationships are important, and I treat patients as friends and strive to know them as a person before I understand their issues.

Helping patients during Covid

The pandemic has been a very trying time for dialysis patients, especially as they are more vulnerable to the virus due to their weaker immune systems. I will do daily check-ins with patients and their families via tele-commuting to ensure that they are coping well, educate them on safety and hygiene, and assure them that they are not alone during these difficult times.

An unforgettable experience

A vivid encounter that is etched in my mind was one of an elderly dialysis patient who suffered from dementia and had bilateral lower limb weakness. She had an estranged relationship with her only daughter from her first marriage and, during her lucid days, she shared that she wished to reconnect with her daughter. Upon knowing that her days were numbered, her second husband and I hoped to fulfil her wish and started reaching out to her daughter. Her daughter eventually visited her mother at the hospital before her passing. Helping to bring about a reconciliation between mother and daughter gave me an inner sense of fulfilment.

Self-care to care better for others

There are times when I do feel disheartened in coping with challenges, but ultimately, I am still human. In times like these, removing myself from the situation for a while is helpful as I can re-energise to better care for others. During this short downtime, I will either go for a run to clear my mind or pour my heart out to my family members, close friends or colleagues. Their opinions and suggestions provide me with different perspectives, which helps me manage my expectations. In this profession of caring for people, I am also prone to burnouts. While I still find myself having to think about work and checking emails after working hours or during weekends, I remind myself to spend quality time with my family, especially with my baby, so as not to miss out on any of his milestones.

Deeply rewarding

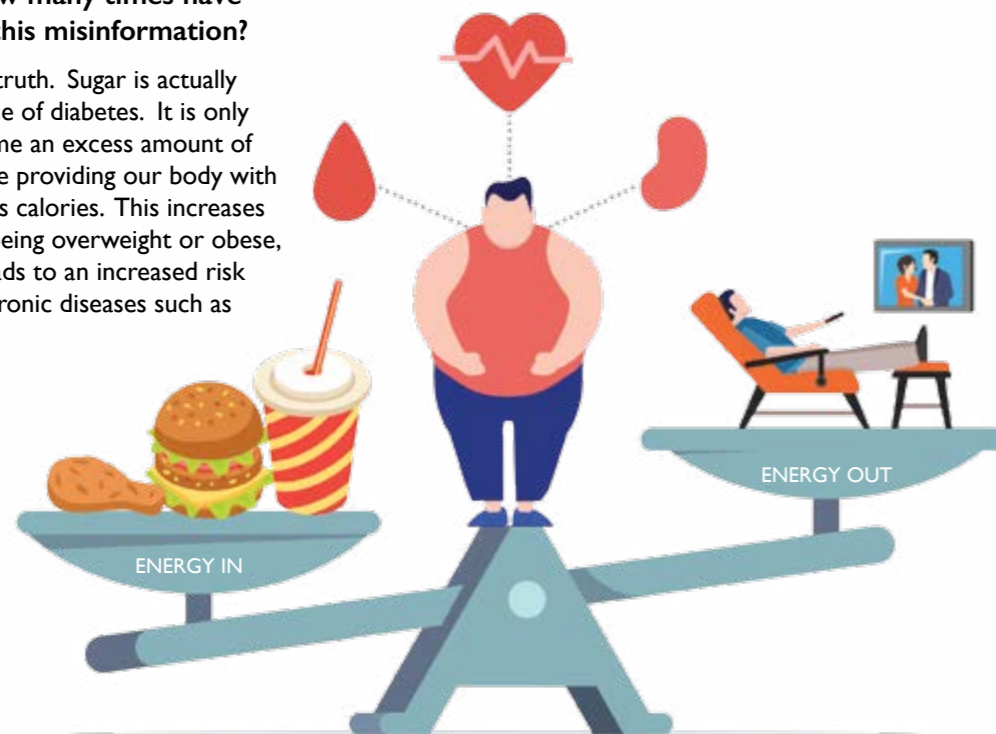
Being a social worker indeed gives me the privilege to help patients and their families navigate through tough decisions and impact their lives in a positive way. I feel appreciated when patients thank me. While it is often difficult work, it is truly meaningful and fulfilling. As long as I have done my best, that is good enough for me. ■



The unsweetened truth about diabetes

“Eating too much sugar causes diabetes.” How many times have you heard of this misinformation?

Well, here’s the truth. Sugar is actually not a direct cause of diabetes. It is only when we consume an excess amount of sugar, that we are providing our body with unwanted, excess calories. This increases the risk of one being overweight or obese, which in turn leads to an increased risk of developing chronic diseases such as diabetes.



Other risk factors of diabetes

We now know that being overweight or obese will increase the risk of diabetes. But is that all to it? You may also be at risk for type 2 diabetes if you have pre-diabetes, are 45 years or older, have a family history of diabetes, lead a sedentary lifestyle or ever had gestational diabetes.

Although some risk factors are non-modifiable, we can work on certain risk factors that are modifiable, such as our diet and lifestyle. These can be improved to lower our overall risk of diabetes. For overweight or obese individuals, the good news is that they can lower their risk of diabetes by 58% if they lose 7% of their body weight (Hamman et al., 2006). This is imperative as diabetes is one of the leading causes of kidney failure.

“Free” sugar
Increased risk of diabetes, obesity and tooth decay



Natural sugar
Not associated with adverse outcomes



Not all sugars are created equal

Sugars can be categorised as “free” and natural sugar. “Free” sugar refers to syrup and juice concentrates added to foods and is associated with an increased risk of being overweight or obese. Hence we should be consuming less of it, as it does not provide any nutritive value and is just a source of empty calories. On the other hand, natural sugar from fruits, vegetables and dairy products are not associated with adverse outcomes. So, not all sugars are necessarily bad! □

Did you know?

The limit for daily sugar intake is 5 teaspoons of sugar, as advised by the World Health Organisation. However, Singaporeans are consuming an average of 12 teaspoons of sugar per day, which is more than twice the limit!





Are you coco-nut about coconut shakes?

With the hot and humid weather in Singapore, it is easy to understand why many people love cold drinks. These days, the craze is all about coconut shakes, which are perceived by many to be a healthier alternative as compared to bubble teas. Just how true is this?

What goes into coconut shakes?

Coconut water is a key ingredient of coconut shakes. However, to elevate its taste and achieve a thick consistency, coconut shake also contains added sugars or syrups, coconut cream or milk, and even ice cream! A regular-sized cup (500ml) of coconut shake can contain as much as 300 to 350 calories and about 30g (5 teaspoons) of sugar*. With just one coconut shake, you would have already reached your daily sugar limit!

**Singapore Heart Foundation, Jul 2021*

Here are some tips to make your drink less sinful!

- Choose 0% sugar level when ordering your coconut shake to lower your calorie and sugar intake.
- Opt for no additional toppings, as that means more added calories, sugar and fats!
- Do not upsize your drink.
- Be creative and make your own coconut shake! Replace ice cream, coconut milk or cream with low-fat or skimmed milk, and avoid adding sugar.
- Choose fresh coconut juice over the processed ones.
- Still fancy your coconut shake? Share your drink with someone and remember to consume only in moderation.

Pre-diabetes: A wake-up call, not a life sentence

We are probably all familiar with diabetes mellitus, but what about pre-diabetes? Diabetes mellitus, also commonly known as diabetes, is a medical condition in which our body does not respond to insulin or is unable to produce insulin; it is also unable to utilise the glucose in our blood, leading to high levels. The early part of this condition is called pre-diabetes.

One is considered pre-diabetic when blood sugar levels are higher than the normal range but did not go beyond levels that will deem a person to be diabetic. Just like type 2 diabetes in the early stages, there are no obvious symptoms for pre-diabetes as well. There are more than 400,000 diabetics in Singapore today, with about 1 in 3 not being aware of their condition, and this number is expected to rise to a staggering 1 million by 2050. This means that going for regular health screening is crucial so that your doctor can pick up any signs of pre-diabetes as early as possible through blood tests.

Reverse It!

Pre-diabetes could be alarming, but the condition can actually be reversed with proper diet control and lifestyle modifications like regular exercise and quitting smoking. However, if you neglect the condition, it will set in and progress to become diabetes without intervention – a leading cause of kidney failure. Here are some tips that you can follow to nip diabetes in the budding stage of pre-diabetes and lower your risk of type 2 diabetes.

1. Go for regular screening to detect early signs of diabetes, especially for those with a family history of the condition, as they have an increased risk of developing type 2 diabetes.
2. From 30 December this year, look out for Nutri-Grade labels when purchasing pre-packaged or freshly prepared beverages. Choose options with grade 'A' to avoid drinks that are high in sugar and saturated fat content.
3. Drink water instead of sweetened drinks. Excessive intake of sugar may lead to weight gain and an increased risk of obesity and type 2 diabetes.
4. Have a well-balanced diet by following Health Promotion Board's "My Healthy Plate" as a guide.
5. Exercise regularly. It helps in controlling your blood sugar level and body weight.
6. Limit alcohol intake to no more than 1 standard drink for women and 2 standard drinks for men per day.

Remember that early detection is key to reversing pre-diabetes and will make a difference in your life. Take action now for a healthier you!

Shop with a heart

Started back in 2020 during the Covid-19 lockdown, our eShop 'Shop With A Heart' serves as an alternative platform for us to raise funds, where sales proceeds will be channelled towards kidney failure patients to subsidise their dialysis treatment and holistic care. Working with our growing list of partners, we seek to bring forth a range of curated products and benefits to you and your loved ones, while supporting our patients through your purchase.

So what are you waiting for? Check out our listings and pick up fantastic items at great prices, all for a meaningful cause! As we regularly rotate and refresh our product listings, do keep a lookout for our website and follow us on social media to receive our latest updates and offers!



Shop now!

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