

Women are much more likely to donate a kidney than receive one

This year's World Kidney Day, on the same day as International Women's Day, highlights the altruism of women in donating kidneys

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This year's World Kidney Day, on the same day as International Women's Day (Thursday 8 March) will highlight how women are more likely to donate kidneys than men, and also more likely to suffer from the most serious stages of chronic kidney disease (CKD), mainly because they tend to live longer than men with serious CKD and take longer to reach a critical stage requiring transplantation.

World Kidney Day (organised by the International Society of Nephrology and the International Federation of Kidney Foundations) will also highlight the huge challenges faced by women with CKD who want to have a baby. Despite of a higher risk for preterm delivery or for preeclampsia and related conditions, however, conception is possible even on dialysis. In these cases, daily dialysis is often required to ensure a successful pregnancy, with most dialysis able to take place safely at home using home-based dialysis equipment. Unfortunately, providing intensified dialysis in emerging countries is not always possible in hospital or at home, due to limited infrastructure and prohibitive out-of-pocket expenses.

Data from Europe show that 36% of women that are clinically suitable would offer to donate a kidney to their husband. However, 7% of clinically suitable men go on to donate a kidney for their wife.¹ "Although it is hard to pinpoint a specific reason for higher numbers of wives being donors than husbands, the evidence suggests women are motivated by reasons such as altruism and the desire to help their family continue to survive," says ISN immediate Past President Professor Adeera Levin, a Professor of Medicine at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada.

Across high-income countries, available data also shows that 60-65% of kidney transplant recipients are men. Most of this difference is due to living donation, usually from a woman of the family. Thus while men are much more likely to receive a kidney than women, they are less likely to donate one themselves while alive. However when looking at deceased donors, the difference between deceased men and women donating kidneys appears much smaller. Of course, this is not to say that men do not donate kidneys, it just means that they are less likely to than women.

Worldwide across all countries, some 12% of the general population has chronic kidney disease (CKD), from the least serious (stage 1) to the most severe (stage 5). However available data suggests the rate of CKD in women, 14%, is slightly higher than in men (12%). While there are more men than women on dialysis (the reasons for this are not fully understood), data from different countries (USA, UK, France, Germany, Italy, Canada, Australia, Brazil and China) show that higher proportions of women live with advanced CKD. While there are specific conditions unique to women that could explain some of this difference, including higher rates of renal infections and autoimmune disease (such as lupus nephropathy), experts believe that systemic failures to detect or manage CKD in women leave women at a higher risk of progression and complications.

This year's World Kidney Day will also put the spotlight on women with CKD who are pregnant or are wishing to conceive. The challenges these women face include very careful management by nephrologists.

In women who have had a successful kidney transplant, fertility can be at least partly restored and chances of successful birth increase, “ says Dr Giorgina Piccoli, ISN Pregnancy in CKD expert, based at the University of Torino, Italy, and Centre Hospitalier Le Mans, France. “However, complications in these women remain more common than in the general population, and preconception medical counselling should always be sought. There is a clear need for higher awareness of CKD in pregnancy, to timely identify CKD in pregnancy, and to follow-up women with CKD during and after pregnancy. When a woman becomes pregnant may be also a valuable occasion for early diagnosis of CKD, thus allowing planning of therapeutic interventions.”

Dr Piccoli also highlights that pregnancy-related complications increase the risk of kidney disease: pre-eclampsia, a syndrome in which a defect of the implantation of the placenta affects normal kidneys inducing high blood pressure and protein in the urine, is one of the 3 leading causes of maternal mortality. Preeclampsia, septic abortion (infection of the placenta) and post-partum haemorrhage (major bleeding after giving birth) are leading causes of acute kidney injury (AKI) in young women and may lead to CKD in those who survive.

“Women face unique issues in relation to kidney disease and donation, and since this year’s World Kidney Day coincides with International Women’s Day, we decided now was the time to showcase these issues,” concludes Professor Levin. “While we want to increase kidney disease awareness and donation rates in all men and women, it appears that women are at a disadvantage both in their chances of receiving a kidney and their higher rates of more serious kidney disease. We must do all we can to close this gap.”

To speak with Dr Giorgina Piccoli or Professor Adeera Levin, please contact Agnese Ruggiero, Campaign Manager at ISN. T) +32 497 818624) agnese@worldkidneyday.org

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OTHER DETAILS TO ADD

LINKS TO DATA TABLE

LINKS TO CONTACT DETAILS

HOW TO CONTACT PREGNANCY CASE STUDIES – will send you the details in the course of the week

World Kidney Day Campaign:

<http://www.worldkidneyday.org/2018-campaign/2018-wkd-theme/>

Refs

¹ <https://www.karger.com/Article/Fulltext/446357>