

Free screenings to raise awareness of kidney disease

To improve the understanding of kidney disease and its consequences, National Renal Care (NRC) Sedibeng is hosting a health awareness day on Tuesday 2 September 2014 from 9am to 4pm at the NRC Sedibeng, 33 Rhodes Avenue in Vereeniging. On the day, people will have the opportunity to have their kidney function, blood pressure and blood glucose levels screened free of charge.



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Part of National Kidney Week (2-6 September), this event's purpose is to educate and inform members of the public about a range of important healthcare issues that could lead to kidney failure. NRC, a joint venture between Netcare and Adcock Ingram Critical Care, is working with a number of organisations to bring the initiative to the public.

Kidney disease is a serious illness and, according to the National Kidney Foundation of South Africa, results in the deaths of some 10 000 South Africans of all ages and backgrounds every year. Most people are not aware of this potentially devastating condition, how it is caused and how to reduce the risk of developing it.

Llolo Masoka, Gauteng operations manager at NRC, believes that improving awareness among South Africans about this illness is critical and should be made a priority in this country. "Not only is kidney disease a major killer but thousands of South Africans have to live with it every day while many families are impacted by the condition. The great tragedy is that in many cases the disease is avoidable. It is also usually treatable, if it is detected early."

Diabetes, high blood pressure exacerbates it

He explains that diabetes and high blood pressure are by far the most common causes of chronic kidney disease (CKD) in South Africa. "Unfortunately far too many people are walking around with these medical conditions without knowing it and they can cause critical damage to the kidneys without one even being aware of it. If we can identify and treat South Africans with conditions such as these early on, we could prevent many cases of CKD.

"This is an outreach initiative, which we are undertaking in order to express our appreciation to a community that has been supportive of our activities. While having the screenings done, individuals will also receive important information on how to spot the signs and symptoms of kidney disease and learn how a healthy lifestyle can delay the onset of end-stage renal disease."

Management of lifestyle helps

Masoka points out that the basic function of the kidneys is to filter waste products from the blood. Healthier lifestyle choices can help reduce the risk of them becoming damaged and diseased.

Regular exercise, a diet rich in vegetables and fruit and low in salt, potassium and protein can assist in keeping these important organs healthy. Giving up smoking and reducing alcohol consumption to one drink a day is also highly recommended. Medical conditions such as diabetes and hypertension should be strictly managed in consultation with a doctor.

"High blood pressure can damage the nephrons, the smallest functional filtering units of the kidneys, thereby impairing kidney functioning. Kidney disease is also a known complication of diabetes. If blood glucose levels are too high, the kidneys must work harder to maintain the necessary filtering processes. High levels of blood sugar make the kidneys filter too much blood. All this extra work is hard on the filters and after many years they may start to leak."

"We encourage all members of the community to attend the health awareness day. The event will provide people with the opportunity to have their risks for kidney disease assessed and learn more about an illness that is impacting so many South African families," he concludes.

For more information, go to www.nrc.co.za.

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