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“Take care of your kidneys, so they can take care of you, urges KZN Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo

Today, 10 March 2016, South Africa will join the world in commemorating World Kidney Day. This is a global awareness campaign aimed at raising awareness of the importance of our kidneys.

According to the South African Government website, www.gov.za, it is estimated that out of a million South Africans, 500 suffer from end stage kidney disease. This translates to around 25 000 South Africans per year.

KwaZulu-Natal Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, has called on each and every individual to be responsible and take care of their own kidneys.

“Our kidneys perform a very important task in our bodies – cleanse and get rid of all the unwanted substances that are not good,” says MEC Dhlomo.

“But the kidney, unlike the nose and the lung, does not sneeze or cough. Therefore, we all need to be highly vigilant to be able to pick up any signs of kidney-related problems in their early stages. We have a duty to take care of our kidneys so that they will also take care of us.”

Unlike many diseases, kidney disease often has no symptoms until it is very advanced.

"It is therefore very important for people to be aware of the risks associated with kidneys, as well as what they can do to keep their kidneys healthy for a long time. That is why it is important to get tested," he said.

Testing for kidney disease entails:

- Measuring the level of serum creatinine in the blood; and
- Measuring the level of protein in the urine (increased levels of protein show that kidneys are not working right).

People who are at risk for kidney disease include who have:

- Diabetes;
- High blood pressure;
- Heart disease;
- A family history of kidney disease; and
- Those who smoke and drink alcohol.

According to a joint initiative between the International Society of Nephrology and the International Federation of Kidney Foundations (IFKF), there are eight golden rules that we need to follow, in order to keep our kidneys healthy.

These are:

- Keep fit and active. This reduces your blood pressure and therefore reduces the risk of Chronic Kidney Disease;
- Keep regular control of your blood sugar level. About half of people who have diabetes develop kidney damage, so it is important for people with diabetes to have regular tests to check their kidney functions;
- Monitor your blood pressure. Although many people may be aware that high blood pressure can lead to a stroke or heart attack, few know that it is also the most common cause of kidney damage;
- Eat healthy and keep your weight in check. This can help prevent diabetes, heart disease and other conditions associated with Chronic Kidney Disease;
- Reduce your salt intake. The recommended sodium intake is 5-6 grams of salt per day (around a teaspoon). In order to reduce your salt intake, try and limit the amount of processed and restaurant food and do not add salt to food;
- Maintain a healthy fluid intake. Although clinical studies have not reached an agreement on the ideal quantity of water and other fluids we should consume daily to maintain good health, traditional wisdom has long suggested drinking 1.5 to 2 litres (3 to 4 pints) of water per day;
- Do not smoke. Smoking slows the flow of blood to the kidneys. When less blood reaches the kidneys, it impairs their ability to function properly. Smoking also increases the risk of kidney cancer by about 50 percent; and
- Do not take over-the-counter pills on a regular basis. Common drugs such non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs are known to cause kidney damage and disease if taken regularly.

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