

World Kidney Day: Patient groups partner with Novartis to hold multistakeholder forum on enhancing health access of renal replacement therapy patients

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- Chronic kidney disease (CKD) is among the leading causes of sickness and death in the Philippines. Latest estimates show that around 2.3 million Filipinos have CKD.³ The National Kidney and Transplant Institute (NKTi) estimates that one Filipino develops chronic kidney failure every hour or about 120 Filipinos per million population every year.
- To help address this pressing problem, a multistakeholder forum on equitable access to health among renal replacement therapy (RRT) patients entitled “Batong Bato ka na ba? Tara usap tayo!” was held on March 7, 2023 at the NKTi in Quezon City in observance of World Kidney Day 2023.

Chronic kidney disease (CKD) occurs when the kidneys have been damaged over time and can no longer function the way they should. Diabetes and high blood pressure are key risk factors. CKD can get worse over time, and the kidneys may stop working altogether, known as kidney failure. In addition, CKD can be a risk factor for other diseases, including cardiovascular diseases.¹

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If left untreated, CKD can progress to more severe complications such as end-stage renal disease (ESRD) which requires more immediate and regular interventions such as renal replacement therapies ranging from hemodialysis to renal transplant. The increasing number of CKD cases have become an urgent national concern due to the burden of the disease and high costs of care, according to the Department of Health (DOH).² CKD currently costs more than breast, lung, colon and skin cancer combined.⁵

To help address this pressing problem, a multistakeholder forum on equitable access to health among renal replacement therapy (RRT) patients entitled “Batong Bato ka na ba? Tara usap tayo!” was held on March 7, 2023 at the NKTi in Quezon City. Held in observance of World Kidney Day 2023, the forum was organized by the Kidney Transplant Association of the Philippines (KITAP), Dialysis PH Support Group Inc., Kidney Transplant Philippines, and Renal Patients and Relatives Organization Inc. in partnership with Novartis Healthcare Philippines.

Celebrated on March 9 of every year, World Kidney Day aims to raise awareness of the importance of our kidneys to our overall health and to reduce the frequency and impact of kidney disease and its associated health problems worldwide. This year’s theme is “Preparing for the unexpected, supporting the vulnerable!”

“There is a need for new innovations that better address the significant unmet need in CKD management to help prevent disease progression and improve the lives of people living with kidney diseases. At Novartis, we have a 35-year history in kidney transplant medicines. Our aim now is to reach beyond this heritage and transform the lives of people living with kidney diseases. We are committed to addressing the current unmet needs for these people through investigating new options that may slow kidney disease progression and extend dialysis-free life,” said Mr. Joel Chong, Country President, Novartis Healthcare Philippines.

“There is a need to improve the PhilHealth Z package for kidney transplantation by increasing the benefit package and adding out-patient immunosuppression. Likewise, enhance the Z benefit for peritoneal dialysis (PD) by increasing the number of daily exchanges to 4 per day when indicated, include PD exchanges using the cyclor and allow the use of icodextrin, a special kind of PD solution.” All the modalities of renal (kidney) replacement should increase SIMULTANEOUSLY, to allow the patient to choose the modality that will offer them the highest survival and the best quality

of life," said Dr. Romina A. Danguilan, NKTl Deputy Executive Director for Medical Services, who gave an overview of the state of RRT in the Philippines during the forum.

"Organ donation and transplantation in the Philippines is still evolving. The potential for deceased organ donation has not yet been fully recognized and realized in the country. Developing the deceased organ donation program is important to improve transplantation rates and help combat organ trafficking of living donors," said NKTl Executive Director Dr. Rose Marie O. Rosete-Liquete, who spoke on advocacy and challenges to organ donation in the Philippines.

KITAP president Ms Delia Gayman welcomed the attendees, and KITAP vice president Ms. Marimel S. Lamsin shared the patient perspective on barriers to access to post-kidney transplant healthcare and treatment.

"We call to improve government coverage for renal replacement therapy, enhance service delivery in rural areas, and conduct continuous health education campaigns for the general population and CKD and ESRD patients," said Mr. Reynaldo S. Abacan, Jr., founder & president, Dialysis PH Support Group Inc.

"Congratulations to KITAP, Dialysis PH, Kidney Transplant Philippines, and Renal Patients and Relatives Organization for helping ease the financial burden of patients and promoting kidney disease awareness. In line with the Novartis Commitment to Patients and Caregivers, we actively seek out and listen to insights from the patient community to help improve treatment outcomes and strengthen healthcare systems," said Ms. Christine Fajardo, Patient Engagement Head, Novartis Healthcare Philippines & Novartis Innovative Medicines Asia Aspiring.

A distinguished panel consisting of local government unit (LGU) executives and officials of PhilHealth, DOH, HTAC, Malasakit Center, Land Transportation Office, National Council for Disability Affairs, and Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office engaged in a lively discussion on ways to improve RRT in the country. Former DOH Undersecretary Dr. Madeleine De Rosas Valera facilitated the Q&A session and delivered the synthesis, next steps, and closing remarks.



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Gayman, all officers of the Kidney Transplant Association of the Philippines (KITAP); Christine Fajardo, Patient Engagement Head, Novartis Healthcare Philippines & Novartis Innovative Medicines Asia Aspiring; Dr. Romina A. Danguilan, NKTl Deputy Executive Director for Medical Services; Remedios Alloza, Senior Transplant Marketing Manager, Novartis Healthcare Philippines; Grace delos Arcos (KITAP officer); and Philip Nicolas, Specialist, Novartis Healthcare Philippines.



Panel members composed of representatives from PhilHealth, Malasakit Center, Health Technology Assessment, National Council for Disability Affairs, Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office, Dialysis PH Support Group, Inc. and National Kidney Institute answered questions from patients and guests during the open forum of the multi-stakeholder meeting in celebration of World Kidney Day. Discussions focused on government initiatives and ways forward to ensure equitable access to medicines, care and treatment for RRT patients.



(L-R) Representatives from KITAP, Ms. Grace delos Arcos, VP-External, Ma. Grace Aquino, PRO, together with guest speaker Dr. Rose Marie Lique, NKT-Executive Director and Ms. Ma. Natividad Magalad, former VP-External of KITAP shared their perspectives on the challenges that CKD patients encounter in accessing care, securing adequate funding for their treatment, and accessing improved facilities.

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List of links present in page

- <https://www.novartis.com/ph-en/ph-en/news/world-kidney-day-patient-groups-novartis-enhancing-health-access-renal-replacement-therapy-patients>
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