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NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH

National Institute of Diabetes
and Digestive and Kidney Diseases

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NIH Launches Pilot Program to Prevent Kidney Disease in African Americans

Today marked the launch of the first NIH pilot education program to increase awareness about kidney disease and promote early testing among African Americans, who are among those hardest hit by kidney disease. The National Kidney Disease Education Program (NKDEP) and its partners held the kick-off during the Steering Committee meeting in Bethesda, Maryland.

“You Have the Power to Prevent Kidney Disease,” is a year-long pilot program in four cities--Atlanta, Baltimore, Cleveland and Jackson, Mississippi--chosen for their relatively large African American communities and because some resources already existed. Local coalitions are working through the media, through dialysis patients and their families, and through other outlets to encourage people at high risk for kidney disease to be tested and to learn about treatments that can help them avoid the fate of so many others. The program is stressing: (1) Know if you are at risk, (2) have your kidneys tested, and (3) learn about treatments.

“This education program has been built with members of the communities it aims to serve, so its messages--that kidney disease can be prevented and treated--are on target to reach the people who most need to know,” says Griffin Rodgers, M.D., deputy director of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, part of the National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which supports NKDEP.

Kidney disease has been called slow and silent but it has epidemic proportions, striking roughly 20 million people. Another 400,000 or more are already on dialysis or have a kidney transplant because their own kidneys failed, costing taxpayers, insurers, and patients \$19.35 billion in 2000. All are at higher-than-average risk for heart attacks, strokes, and other serious problems.

Anyone with diabetes, high blood pressure, or a family member with kidney problems is at high risk for kidney disease. But it hits African Americans especially hard, which is why NKDEP organizers have been repeatedly advised to focus on these individuals first. African Americans

are four times more likely than whites to have kidney failure, but the biggest problem is among 25- to 44-year-olds, who are 20 times more likely to develop the disease.

“People just don’t make the connection between their diabetes or their high blood pressure and kidney disease, and they are from families riddled with these problems,” says Thomas Hostetter, M.D., director of NKDEP. “It’s startling, but clear, evidence of the desperate need to help people become more literate about their health,” Hostetter says.

NKDEP will evaluate the effectiveness of its pilot efforts by measuring changes in knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and practices through two surveys, one conducted before the campaign’s launch and a second a year later. The program will also monitor audience and media reactions to events and materials.

The program’s 30 partners include both public agencies and private organizations.

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