

ASN Executive Vice President's Update: A New Strategic Plan for What We Can Accomplish Together

By Tod Ibrahim

Last year, ASN President Susan E. Quaggin, MD, FASN, and I alternated sending monthly email updates to ASN members. Drafting these updates helped us put individual activities—such as the society's commitment to justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion—into a broader context. This year, we're excited to publish these updates as editorials in *ASN Kidney News*.

2022 marks Dr. Quaggin's 33rd year as a member of ASN. "Over this period, it has been amazing to witness the growth and impact of our programs, which are driving innovation and positive changes in education, research, and patient care," she told me recently. "I am so proud to be a member of a society and a community that puts patients first—always. I know that together, we can—and we will—make great strides to reach our shared vision of a world without kidney diseases."

During the past decade, ASN has evolved from a membership society to the ASN Alliance for Kidney Health. In addition to ASN, the alliance includes:

- KidneyCure, a foundation that spends more than \$3 million annually to support trainees and early-career professionals
- The Kidney Health Initiative (KHI), a partnership among ASN, the US Food and Drug Administration, and more than 100 member organizations to "catalyze innovation and the development of safe and effective patient-centered therapies for people living with kidney diseases"
- The Kidney Innovation Accelerator (KidneyX), a partnership between ASN and the US Department of Health and Human Services that has funded more than 60 innovators to date
- Nephrologists Transforming Dialysis Safety (NTDS), a partnership between ASN and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that is the centerpiece of a broader effort to ensure excellence in patient care for the millions of people with kidney diseases

Last month, I summarized the alliance's accomplishments since January 2020 from "A to Z." As part of this overview, I noted that the alliance has a new strategic plan that will guide us through December 2025.

To create the alliance's vision of "a world without kidney diseases," we must work together to achieve our mission to "elevate care by educating and informing, driving breakthroughs and innovation, and advocating for policies that create transformative changes in kidney medicine throughout the world." Realizing this vision and mission requires us to accomplish five important goals.

Goal 1: Advance the work of kidney medicine.

For far too long, we've focused on kidney failure instead of kidney health. By creating a stronger focus on kidney health, we'll be better positioned to intervene earlier to prevent, diagnose, coordinate care, and educate. This approach will allow us to develop broad partnerships to address the health of the global population, promote health equity, and advocate for high-quality therapies, including home dialysis and transplant.

In addition to NTDS, the alliance's efforts to advance kidney medicine include AKI!Now: Promoting Excellence in the Prevention and Treatment of Acute Kidney Injury (AKI), the ASN Augmented Intelligence and Digital Health Task Force, the COVID-19 Response Team, the Diabetic Kidney Disease Collaborative, the Emergency Partnership Initiative, the ASN Home Dialysis Task Force, Improving Adult Immunization Rates (a project with the Council of Medical Specialty Societies [CMSS] that includes ASN and six other societies), and Project Firstline (a partnership between ASN and the American Medical Association).

Goal 2: Accelerate innovation and expand patient choice.

This goal has twin aspirations: advancing kidney health and speeding up kidney research. When fully aligned, KidneyCure, KHI, and KidneyX can support individuals and entities, including commercial enterprises, to produce amazing results and advance the field. At the same time, we must also focus on building research readiness, inclusiveness, and translation in kidney medicine, which require championing clinical trials. The best way to advance the field is to develop innovative partnerships, creatively pursue scientific opportunities, and increase public and private funding for research.

For example, National Kidney Foundation (NKF) Chief Executive Officer Kevin Longino and I recently published an op-ed on the *Health Affairs* blog. On behalf of ASN, NKF, and the rest of the community, Mr. Longino and I asserted, "To guarantee that the more than 37 million Americans with kidney disease receive the care they deserve, Congress and the Biden Administration must increase funding for kidney research" for the National Institutes of Health, KidneyX, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Chronic Kidney Disease Initiative as well as "include kidney research in any future funding related to the COVID-19 pandemic."

Goal 3: Lead culture change that creates a diverse, equitable, and inclusive pathway for advancing kidney health.

The only way to achieve equity and eliminate disparities is by identifying, confronting, and overcoming systemic racism in health care, science, and kidney medicine. That is a commitment we must make together, and we cannot waver. While focused on these issues, we must also engage future members of the kidney care team and scientists by increasing interest in kidney medicine and broadening the alliance's outreach and appeal. If successful, we'll provide a professional home that promotes and accelerates growth, opportunities, and advancement throughout all stages of your career.

When the next group of nephrology fellows starts in July 2022, ASN will provide six of them—who identify as underrepresented in medicine—with \$50,000 each over three years as part of the society's new Loan Mitigation Pilot Program. ASN has committed \$2.7 million to this pilot, which I hope becomes enduring, like the society's partnership with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to support the Harold Amos Medical Faculty Development Program or the travel support that ASN provides for its members to attend the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases Network of Minority Health Research Investigators Annual Workshop.

ASN also participates in "Equity Matters: A Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Antiracism Initiative for Physicians and Medical Leadership," a collaboration between the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education and CMSS. This program will result in a "capstone project," likely focusing on students, residents and fellows, which would expand the society's other initiatives for trainees, such as Kidney TREKS (Tutored Research and Education for Kidney Scholars), Kidney STARS (Students and Residents), and the Karen L. Campbell, PhD, Travel Support Program for Fellows.

Table 1. Principles that drive decisions

- What is best for people with kidney diseases and their families?
- What is best for strengthening the relationship between patients and their health professionals?
- What is best for the specialty of kidney medicine?
- What is best for the kidney community?
- What is best for the ASN Alliance for Kidney Health?
 - Vision, mission, and goals
 - Resources
 - Revenue, expense, and margin

Goal 4: Create dynamic educational tools and environments, assertively communicate information about kidney medicine, identify opportunities to utilize health care data to screen for and protect kidney health, and engage everyone interested in kidney diseases.

For nearly 60 years, ASN has produced, aggregated, and promoted content, including continuing education, certification and recertification, and peer-reviewed literature. While producing content that reaches current and new audiences, organizing this content thematically, and connecting distribution channels (especially social media), the alliance must focus on credibility and excellence. Doing so requires creating a rich environment that elevates knowledge, understanding, partnerships, and other interactions.

As a result of the pandemic, education and publishing transformed forever. More correctly, expected changes to education and publishing accelerated dramatically during the past two years, and they're showing no signs of slowing down. As the producer of the most kidney-related content, the alliance must embrace these transformations while thinking differently about ASN Kidney Week, other educational activities, and the society's three peer-reviewed journals and *Kidney News*.

Goal 5: Advocate for policies that empower patients and their care partners, the kidney care team and scientists, health systems, payers, and other stakeholders with a role in kidney health.

ASN advances policies through federal legislative and regulatory advocacy that promotes kidney health, transforms transplant and increases access to donor kidneys, and champions health equity and eliminates disparities. These efforts only succeed, however, if the society builds relationships that include key stakeholders inside and outside of the kidney community. Increasingly, ASN is working to help develop, articulate, and advance a global kidney health policy agenda.

I'm often asked how ASN makes decisions about which policies to support, oppose, or remain neutral about. Table 1 summarizes the principles the society's leadership, staff, and I use to help guide such decision-making. It's hard to go wrong when you put people with kidney diseases and their families first. As Dr. Quaggin asserted, ASN, the broader alliance, and the kidney community put "patients first—always."

During her ASN President's Address at Kidney Week 2021, Dr. Quaggin remarked, "We must remember who we are, what we have achieved, and what we can accomplish together." I hope you will join Dr. Quaggin and me in helping to accomplish the new strategic plan for ASN and the broader ASN Alliance for Kidney Health. ■