

National Kidney Month, World Kidney Day Campaigns Launch in March

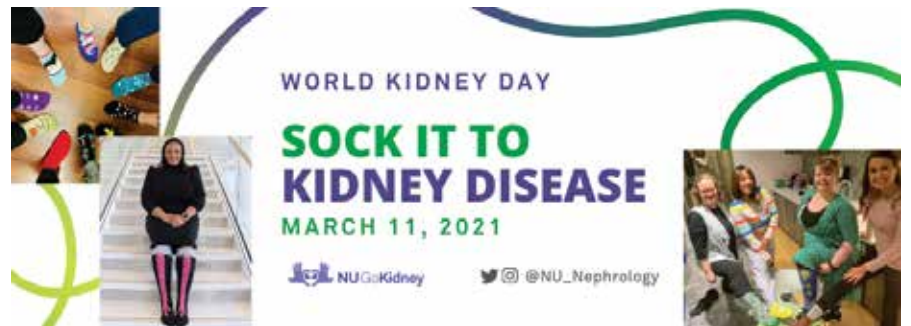
By Karen Blum

Raising awareness of kidney diseases worldwide and empowering people living with them are the focus of campaigns launching in March. One in three adults in the United States is at risk for kidney diseases. To shed light on the prevalence of this condition, the National Kidney Foundation (NKF), in honor of National Kidney Month, asks, “Are you the 33%?”

The slogan is part of a strategic digital campaign focused on reaching, educating, and empowering Americans who are Hispanic and of Black race, as well as individuals over age 35 or those who have one or more risk factors for kidney diseases, to take control of their kidney health. Outreach planned by the foundation includes digital advertisements, tailored web content, and a customized email series.

“We want people in the community who are at risk for kidney disease to understand their risks, so that we can empower them to take control of their health and have conversations with their clinicians about testing for kidney disease,” said Joseph Vassalotti, MD, chief medical officer of the NKF and an associate clinical professor of medicine at Mount Sinai in New York. Ethnic and racial disparities with regard to kidney diseases unfortunately have worsened with the COVID-19 pandemic, he said. “We have a lot of work to do to improve patient-level awareness of kidney disease.”

The Northwestern University George M. O’Brien Kidney Research Core Center (NU GoKidney) celebrates World Kidney Day with its “Sock It to Kidney Disease” campaign to help raise awareness and empower people living with kidney diseases. Working with kidney diseases research advocate and hip-hop artist David Rush, who first suspected his kidney health problems by the tightness of his socks around his ankles, NU GoKidney encourages everyone to show their socks on social media to demonstrate solidarity with Rush and others



all over the world.

Susan E. Quaggin, MD, FASN, ASN president and director of NU GoKidney, writes, “I am delighted that ASN will be joining NU GoKidney in this year’s #SockItToKidneyDisease campaign. Last year, we reached over 350,000 people, and this year—with the help of the ASN membership—we are hoping to reach even more!”

In related news, World Kidney Day is slated for Thursday, March 10, with the theme “Kidney Health for All.” Specifically, it calls on the nephrology community and others to work to bridge the knowledge gaps toward better kidney care. “Improving health literacy largely rests with health care providers communicating and educating effectively in code-signed partnership with those with kidney disease,” wrote Robyn G. Langham, MD, PhD, a nephrologist with the University of Melbourne in Australia, along with other World Kidney

Day Joint Steering Committee members, in an editorial in *Kidney International* and *Nephrology Dialysis Transplantation* (1, 2). “The growing capability of and access to technology provides new opportunities to enhance education and awareness of kidney disease for all stakeholders,” the authors said.

“As we move into a much more technically literate world, health literacy is sort of struggling to keep up,” Langham told *Kidney News*. “It’s fair to say that most people would know a little bit about their heart, heart disease, cholesterol and blood pressure. But when you ask [average people] on the street about kidneys, they don’t know where they are; they don’t know what they do. It’s a little bit harder when it’s a hidden organ that does all of its work silently in the background, and it has very few ways of telling us that it’s sick.”

Kidney organizations should work toward shifting the patient-deficit health literacy narrative to that of being the responsibility of health care providers and health policymakers, Langham and her coauthors wrote. Low health literacy occurs in all countries regardless of income status; therefore, simple, low-cost strategies are likely to be effective. Good communication can be implemented by all kidney health team members, they said, including nurses, advanced practice providers, dietitians, pharmacists, and other allied health professionals.

“Through this vision, kidney organizations will lead the shift to improved patient-centered care, support for care partners, health outcomes, and the global societal burden of kidney health care,” the authors wrote.

This is a call to nephrologists to be better communicators to patients and caregivers, medical students, physician colleagues, and others, Langham and Vassalotti agree. Nephrologists tend to start formulating answers to patient questions as they are talking, Langham added. But for health literacy, she said, it’s important to fully understand where the patient’s need is and to stop and listen before responding.

For more information on National Kidney Month and the NKF campaign, see <https://www.kidney.org/nkmttoolbox>. For more information on World Kidney Day, see <https://www.worldkidneyday.org/2022-campaign/2022-wkd-theme/>. These websites have tools, such as messages to share on social media, Zoom backgrounds, posters, and a sample letter requesting businesses and landmarks to “light up orange.” ■

References

- Langham RG, et al. Kidney health for all: Bridging the gap in kidney health education and literacy. *Kidney Int* [published online ahead of print January 31, 2022]. [https://www.kidney-international.org/article/S0085-2538\(21\)01218-7/fulltext](https://www.kidney-international.org/article/S0085-2538(21)01218-7/fulltext)
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