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MEPs SUPPORT A 'WAKE-UP CALL' TO ADDRESS SILENT EPIDEMIC OF CHRONIC KIDNEY DISEASE IN EUROPE

Launch of MEP Group for Kidney Health

On 4th March, European kidney patients, nurses, physicians and researchers came together with MEPs in a new forum aimed at sharing information and recommendations for action on a current health scourge. The MEP Group for Kidney Health was formed due to the need to address the silent epidemic of Chronic Kidney Disease in Europe, in particular through preventative initiatives at European Union and Member State level.

The MEP Group for Kidney Health, an initiative of the European Kidney Health Alliance (EKHA), held its inaugural meeting a week before the third annual 'World Kidney Day' which aims at highlighting the importance of healthy kidneys. Mrs Frieda Brepoels MEP who chairs the Group, and Professor Andrew Rees, Chairman of EKHA, introduced the session by explaining the seriousness of the burden of CKD in Europe and highlighted the need for urgent action to curb current increases in the disease. Participants went on to discuss existing EU activities related to kidney health and to debate options for further action at EU and Member State level to step up the fight against the silent epidemic of CKD which currently affects 10% of the EU population and is set to grow to double this figure if current trends continue unabated.

On 10th March, Mrs Brepoels formally announced the

creation of the group in the European Parliament's **plenary session** in Strasbourg and asked fellow MEPs to express their support for the initiative:

"It is estimated that around 40 million people in Europe are affected by some form of kidney disease, and in the next 10 years this figure is set to double. The European Parliament can play an important role in encouraging Member States to urgently take decisive action. First the scale of the problem should be recognised and second strategies should be put in place to prevent this silent epidemic from growing at its current rate"



Mrs Frieda Brepoels, MEP and chair of the MEP Group on Kidney Health

The next meeting of the MEP Group for Kidney Health is set to take place in Autumn 2008.

Symposium Chronic Kidney Disease, Europe's Silent Epidemic *A Wake-Up Call*

Also on 4th March, a symposium on Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD) was organised by the European Kidney Health Alliance in the European Parliament in Brussels. An eminent panel of leading renal physicians and nurses, politicians and patient organisations addressed the audience on the need for policies that reduce the burden of kidney disease for patients, physicians and

society at large. In his introductory speech, EKHA Chairman **Professor Andrew Rees** stressed the importance of healthy kidneys by explaining their vital functions of filtering toxins from the blood, maintaining a normal chemical composition of the body, and making essential proteins that control blood pressure, preserve healthy bones and prevent anaemia. Around 10% of the

population of Europe is affected by some form of damage to the kidney which is often initially symptomless and this figure is currently on the increase, making it a silent epidemic for the EU. Professor Rees explained the creation of the European Kidney Health Alliance in the context of the silent epidemic of CKD and the response needed in terms of public health policies to provide safe and effective renal replacement therapy for severe kidney disease and early detection of less severe kidney disease.



From left: Paul E de Jong, Valerie Twomey, Donal O'Donoghue, Andrew Rees, Frieda Brepoels, Karen Jenkins

Mrs Frieda Brepoels MEP gave an endorsement of kidney health issues on behalf of the European Parliament, stating that the challenge of CKD can be effectively addressed at EU-level:

"I strongly believe that the European Union can play a leading role in this regard. Efforts can be pulled together at European level by putting the prevention of kidney disease high on the European agenda. Furthermore, progress can be made by exchanging best practices between Member States and by improving existing technologies to detect kidney disease so as to assure that every European citizen has equal access to high-quality health care".

Valerie Twomey, a patient who underwent dialysis and more recently a kidney transplant, gave an account of her experience with kidney disease. She explained the opportunities afforded to her through her transplant and the rigorous attention she has to pay to her lifestyle as a donor recipient. She expressed the

"EKHA takes a multidisciplinary approach involving patients and their families, doctors and nurses, researchers and other healthcare professionals who work cooperatively for a European health environment in which there is a sustained decrease in kidney disease and its consequences."

The EKHA thanks the World Kidney Day team, Amgen and Hemocue for their support in organising the above events. All photographs by Philippe Molitor www.philippe-molitor.eu

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importance of organ donation by quoting a poem whose closing words were *"organs not required at your onward destination"*.

Karen Jenkins, Renal Clinical Nurse Consultant and Chair of the European Dialysis & Transplant Nurses Association/European Renal Care Association CKD Group, explained the variety of professionals involved in the care of kidney patients – dietitians, social workers, counselors, pharmacists, and community nurses amongst others. **People with CKD have a complex journey and need information, education and support**, and it is up to nurses and related healthcare professionals to provide this through their specialist skills and knowledge.

Paul de Jong, Professor in Nephrology, University Medical Center, University of Groningen, Netherlands, used data from the Prevend study to demonstrate how **early detection** may be achieved by the measurement of albuminuria and eGFR, and explained that such **screening and early treatment of those affected by kidney disease is cost-effective** since related conditions such as cardiovascular disease may be prevented and the costs of dialysis are prevented.

Donal O'Donoghue, National Clinical Director of Kidney Care, UK, spoke about UK CKD policy initiatives and the importance of prevention both for patients and healthcare systems:

"We can count the cost of kidney disease in financial terms, but the impact on the lives of patients as a result of late identification and diagnosis is incalculable. For example, in the UK, dialysis alone accounts for 2% of the total NHS budget and this is projected to double over the next five years. In comparison, the cost of implementing CKD prevention strategies can be modest."

The subsequent roundtable discussion with the audience of 60 experts and EU officials covered issues of psychological preparation of patients coming off dialysis, the links between CKD and other diseases and the health economics of CKD.