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| **Briefing Note** **Date:** April 2020 | |
| **Topic:** | Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Chronic Kidney Disease Care |
| **Prepared for:** | Joint Ontario Indigenous Cancer Committee Members |
| **Prepared by:** | Ontario Renal Network, Ontario Health |

**Purpose:**

* To provide an overview of the impact of COVID-19 on chronic kidney disease (CKD) services based on Ontario Health’s (Cancer Care Ontario) recently published COVID-19 *Pandemic Planning Clinical Guideline for Patients with Chronic Kidney Disease (2020)*,attached as an Appendix*.*

**Background:**

* Concerns were identified by Indigenous communities that access to CKD was impacted as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.
* People with chronic kidney disease, may be at a higher risk of getting seriously ill from a COVID-19 infection. This is because people with chronic kidney disease have compromised immune systems, making it harder to fight infections.
* People who have received a kidney transplant have a higher risk of infection from viruses because they take immunosuppressive medications.

**Overview of the Impact of COVID-19 on CKD Services**

*Impact on Dialysis Treatment*

* There is a need to treat CKD and End-Stage Renal Disease (ESRD) patients during a pandemic. Unless successfully transplanted, ESRD patients require dialysis to stay alive.
* All dialysis patients (in-centre and home dialysis) are deemed critical and will continue to receive treatment even in the event of a pandemic because their situation is unstable, has unbearable suffering and/or is immediately life threatening.

Regional Renal Programs in Ontario are following the guidelines and protocols within their hospitals and from local Public Health authorities, such as prevention and screening practices, and management of confirmed or suspected cases. These include very careful screening questions for infection, and appropriate use of swabs, isolation and personal protective equipment (PPE).

*Impact on Transplant Candidates*

Due to the increased risk of infection among kidney transplant candidates:

* Deceased donor kidney transplant activity, except for highly sensitized and medically urgent patients, have been paused effective March 15, 2020.
* Living Donor Transplant activity, including Kidney Paired Donation, has been paused effective March 13, 2020.
* Transplant work-ups are also on hold, as these patients are required to visit laboratories and imaging centres, which is not currently recommended due to social distancing.
* Wait listed patients and patients with plans for living donor transplant will be informed by mail of these changes. These patients will continue to hold their priority on the waiting list.

Referred patients will be supported to move safely towards transplant when hospitals resume normal activity.

*COVID-19 Screening and Prevention*Regional Renal Programs have implemented screening practices and appropriate precautions to minimize risk:

* In many Programs patients are being secondarily screened at the entrances to dialysis units prior to treatment, in addition to the entrance to hospitals.
* For the purposes of social distancing, where possible, clinic visits are being held via telemedicine or telephone.
* Non-essential in-person contact, such as patient group education sessions, are being cancelled or changed to virtual/telephone where appropriate.

*The Role of the Ontario Renal Network (ORN)*

The role of the ORN in response to a possible pandemic (e.g. COVID-19) is to play a coordinating role, through the following activities:

* Convening Regional Renal Programs leadership to share information amongst programs;
* Providing information should Regional Renal Programs need access to support or information;
* Ensuring that Regional Renal Programs immediately inform the ORN if a disruption in the provision of care services to renal patients is anticipated or occurs;
* Confirming that Regional Renal Programs have an emergency plan in place that is current and relevant; and
* Working with relevant partners to support coordination, as required, if re-referral strategies are needed based on capacity pressures, and in accordance with this guidance document.

ORN's role is not to interfere with hospital protocols nor to provide infection control direction. ORN’s intention is to provide support to the network through information sharing, gathering, and dissemination.

To support local information sharing and collaboration, the ORN is able to connect community and political territorial organization representatives directly with their local Regional Renal Program.

*Impact on ORN Projects with FNIMuI Communities and Organizations*

Due to the impact of COVID-19 on Regional Renal Programs and community health providers, the following initiatives have been affected:

1. CKD Screening - implementation will remain paused, as social distancing and reduced capacity has impacted the ability of staff to travel and train on screening equipment and conduct screening clinics
2. Remote Home Dialysis - RRPs have temporarily paused transition home of new home dialysis patients to remote communities due to travel restrictions and social distancing. Existing remote home dialysis patients (hemodialysis and peritoneal dialysis) continue to receive care and support from their renal program.

**Proposed Next Steps:**

* The Indigenous Cancer Care Unit to discuss the Pandemic Plan with Ontario Health (Cancer Care Ontario) to ensure guidelines meet the needs of all Indigenous chronic kidney disease patients in Ontario.

**Appendix:**

1. *Pandemic Planning Clinical Guideline for Patients with Chronic Kidney Disease (2020):*

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1. *COVID-19 Supplemental Clinical Guidance for Patients with Chronic Kidney Disease (2020):*

