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Coalition To Promote Kidney Disease Prevention Among African Americans

*Atlanta Health and Community Organizations Partner To Hold Kick-off Event at
Grady Memorial Hospital*

The newly formed Atlanta Coalition of the National Kidney Disease Education Program (NKDEP) will officially launch its “*You Have the Power To Prevent Kidney Disease*” education campaign with a kick-off event on Wednesday, May 14, 2003, at Grady Memorial Hospital. The event will feature an information session conducted by medical professionals, kidney disease and dialysis patients, and representatives from the 28 organizations that make up the NKDEP Atlanta Coalition. The event will take place from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. in the Clinic Atrium, Grady Memorial Hospital at 80 Jesse Hill Jr. Drive in Atlanta.

The Atlanta NKDEP is aimed at increasing awareness of kidney disease and promoting early testing for those at risk, especially African Americans who are disproportionately affected by kidney disease. According to national statistics, while African Americans make up 12 percent of the U.S. population, they account for about 30 percent of people with kidney failure. Approximately 20 million Americans have kidney disease and 400,000 people have kidney failure requiring dialysis or a kidney transplant to stay alive. That figure is expected to double in the next 10 years.

The Atlanta Coalition is co-chaired by Janice Lea, M.D., Assistant Professor of Medicine at Emory University, and Christopher Starr, Chief Executive Officer of the National Kidney Foundation (NKF) of Georgia. It is sponsored by NKDEP, an initiative 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. Atlanta is one of four pilot sites for the National Kidney Disease Education Program scheduled to launch nationally in the fall of 2004. The other pilot sites are Baltimore, MD, Cleveland, OH, and Jackson, MS.

“The number one goal of our coalition is to make African Americans, who are disproportionately represented among those with kidney disease, aware of the risks of kidney disease, to encourage them to talk to their physicians about kidney disease, and to get tested if they are at risk,” explains Dr. Lea.

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Co-chair Chris Starr points out that African Americans have four times the risk for kidney failure as the overall U.S. population. In addition, African Americans in Atlanta are at even higher risk, according to the U.S. Renal Data System. “Because people in Atlanta have a 40 percent higher rate of kidney failure than the rest of the nation, it is vital that we in the health community join together to reach out to Atlanta African Americans through a public health education program such as this one,” Starr says.

He added, “The importance of this initiative is underscored by the fact that 28 different organizations have come together in support of a health information program that can truly benefit Atlanta’s African American community.”

The “*You Have the Power To Prevent Kidney Disease*” campaign stresses that:

- Early detection is important. If you have diabetes, hypertension or a family history of kidney failure, you are at risk. Talk to your doctor about having your kidneys checked.
- Effective treatment can prevent and slow kidney damage.
- Left undiagnosed and untreated, kidney disease can lead to kidney failure.

Diabetes and hypertension are directly linked to kidney disease. In Atlanta more than 70 percent of African Americans with kidney failure also have diabetes or hypertension, according to the U.S. Renal Data System. People who have any risk factor for kidney disease should be tested.

“Kidney failure is a significant public health problem. But if kidney disease is found early it can be effectively treated. That’s why it is so important for people who are at risk to be tested,” says Thomas Hostetter, M.D., national Director of NKDEP. “The Atlanta coalition is working hard to get this message to African Americans and their health care providers.”

In addition to the May 14 event, which includes a health screening and the distribution of kidney disease prevention materials, the Atlanta NKDEP Coalition will conduct several activities in conjunction with its member organizations. The coalition also will be participating in joint awareness programs with the Grady, Emory, and Crawford Long Hospitals. The Coalition is also trying to ensure that health professionals get the message by encouraging nephrologists to provide current information from NKDEP to primary care and family physicians in the Atlanta area and through medical grand rounds being planned at Emory, Grady, Crawford Long, Piedmont, and Georgia Baptist Hospitals.

While the Coalition is focusing on the African-American community because of the high incidence of kidney disease among this group, it is open to all and welcomes the involvement and support of the people of Atlanta.

For more information or to learn how to join the NKDEP Atlanta Coalition, call Janice Lea at 404-727-2521, Christopher Starr at 770-452-1539, or Elizabeth Webster at 770-395-7347, or visit the national NKDEP website at www.nkdep.nih.gov.