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The BC Provincial Renal Agency (BCPRA), an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority, plans and coordinates the care of people with kidney disease throughout the province to ensure equitable access to high quality care. www.bcrenalagency.ca

The Kidney Foundation of Canada is a national volunteer organization committed to reducing the burden of kidney disease through funding and stimulating innovative research, providing education and support, promoting access to high quality healthcare and increasing public awareness. www.kidney.bc.ca

MEDIA RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

March 8th is World Kidney Day: A chance to celebrate innovations in care and raise public awareness

Fifty years ago, a diagnosis of kidney failure meant imminent death. Treatment options were limited, and dialysis machines – which filter the blood when the kidneys fail – were not widely available.

“I remember when ‘life and death committees’ made up of laypeople from the community met to decide who would get dialysis and who wouldn’t,” says Dr. Angus Rae, a kidney care pioneer who founded the now thriving St. Paul’s Hospital renal (kidney) unit.

Although there is no cure for chronic kidney disease, the days of life or death committees are long gone: dialysis is considered a life support service, available to everyone who needs it. Thanks to the commitment of health professionals such as Dr. Rae, who established BC as a leader in kidney care, significant improvements have been realized in early diagnosis, patient education and treatment methods.

Through an innovative provincial lab strategy, people with kidney disease are being diagnosed earlier. And with the support of care teams at kidney clinics across the province, they are armed with diet and lifestyle information, as well as appropriate medications, that can delay and in some cases stop progression of the disease.

Patients who do need dialysis have several options, from facility-based hemodialysis to independent forms of dialysis, including home hemodialysis and peritoneal dialysis. Interestingly, hemodialysis started as a home-based service in 1968.

“Today, BC has the highest survival rates for dialysis patients in the country, and we are considered leaders in terms of early diagnosis and promotion of independence,” says Dr. Adeera Levin, nephrologist and executive director of the BC Provincial Renal Agency. “That’s the good news. But there is another side to the story,” she adds. “We estimate that 145,000 British Columbians have undiagnosed kidney disease, and the number of patients with kidney failure continues to grow 6-8 percent every year. Yet a simple blood test can tell you if your kidney function is compromised. Obviously we need to raise awareness of risk factors and symptoms.”

Both World Kidney Day and Kidney Health Month in Canada are designed to do just that. Throughout March, almost 100,000 volunteer canvassers across the country go door to door raising money in support of the work of The Kidney Foundation of Canada. In BC that translates to 8,000 people helping fund kidney research, patient education and support programs and public awareness programs.

