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FREE PROFESSIONAL RESOURCE

Chronic Kidney Disease CKD Awareness in Care Settings

A Practical Guide for Care Staff

Knowledge Hub Resource 065

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Introduction

Chronic kidney disease (**CKD**) is a long-term condition in which the kidneys do not work as effectively as they should. The kidneys perform several important functions, including filtering waste products and excess fluid from the blood and helping maintain the body's fluid and chemical balance.

CKD is more common in older people and individuals living with conditions such as **diabetes, high blood pressure and cardiovascular disease**. It often develops gradually and may cause few or no obvious symptoms during its earlier stages.

As kidney function becomes more reduced, an individual may experience tiredness, swelling, changes in urination, reduced appetite, nausea, itching or generally feeling unwell.

Care staff are not responsible for diagnosing CKD. Their role is to understand how the condition affects the individual, follow the person's care plan and prescribed treatment arrangements, observe for significant changes and report concerns appropriately.

Why This Resource Matters

Understanding chronic kidney disease awareness helps care staff to:

- Understand the basic role of the kidneys.
- Recognise that CKD may initially cause few noticeable symptoms.
- Understand some of the common conditions associated with increased CKD risk.
- Recognise possible changes in an individual's health and wellbeing.
- Observe for changes in urination, swelling, appetite and energy levels.
- Follow individual nutrition and fluid guidance where this has been prescribed.
- Support prescribed medication safely when trained, competent and authorised.
- Understand the importance of accurate observation, recording and reporting.
- Recognise signs of deterioration that require prompt escalation.
- Promote dignity, independence and person-centred care.

What Do the Kidneys Do?

Most people have two kidneys. Their functions include:

- Filtering waste products from the blood.
- Removing excess fluid through urine.
- Helping regulate the balance of water and minerals in the body.
- Helping control blood pressure.
- Supporting the production of red blood cells.
- Helping maintain healthy bones.

When kidney function becomes impaired, these processes may become less effective.

CKD and Individual Care

People living with CKD can have very different needs depending on the severity of their condition, other health conditions and the treatment they receive.

Some individuals may have specific instructions relating to:

- Medication.
- Fluid intake.
- Diet.
- Weight monitoring.
- Blood pressure monitoring.
- Diabetes management.
- Clinical appointments or blood tests.

Care staff should follow the **individual's documented care plan and clinical guidance** rather than applying general restrictions themselves.

Key Message

Never independently restrict fluids or make dietary or medication changes because an individual has chronic kidney disease.

Requirements can vary significantly between individuals.

Care staff should follow the person's prescribed care arrangements, recognise significant changes from their usual condition and **report concerns promptly**.

Understanding Chronic Kidney Disease

Chronic kidney disease (**CKD**) usually develops gradually over time. The condition is divided into stages according to how well the kidneys are functioning, and many people can live with CKD for years with appropriate treatment and monitoring.

Some individuals may have no noticeable symptoms, particularly during the earlier stages. This makes regular clinical monitoring important for people who have been diagnosed with CKD.

Care staff do not need to understand detailed kidney-function test results or determine the stage of CKD. Their responsibility is to follow the individual's care plan, understand what is normal for the person and recognise changes that may require reporting or further assessment.

Possible Symptoms and Changes

As kidney function becomes more reduced, an individual may experience:

- Increased tiredness or weakness.
- Swelling of the feet, ankles, legs or sometimes hands.
- Changes in how frequently they pass urine.
- Changes in the amount or appearance of urine.
- Shortness of breath.
- Reduced appetite.
- Nausea or feeling sick.
- Itchy or dry skin.
- Difficulty sleeping.
- Muscle cramps.
- Difficulty concentrating or changes in alertness.
- Generally feeling more unwell than usual.

These symptoms can have many different causes and **do not necessarily mean that CKD is worsening**.

Care staff should observe, record and report significant changes rather than attempting to diagnose the cause.

Supporting Nutrition and Hydration

Nutrition and hydration requirements for people with CKD can vary considerably.

Depending on the individual's condition and clinical assessment, healthcare professionals may provide specific guidance concerning their diet or fluid intake.

Care staff should:

- Follow the individual's documented nutrition and hydration plan.
- Support prescribed fluid arrangements accurately.
- Record food or fluid intake where required.
- Observe for changes in appetite or drinking.
- Report persistent nausea, vomiting or reduced intake.
- Never introduce a fluid restriction unless it has been clinically prescribed.
- Never make independent dietary restrictions because the person has CKD.

A person with CKD should **not automatically be encouraged to drink more or less fluid** without considering their individual care plan.

Medication and CKD

Kidney function can affect how some medicines are processed by the body. Individuals with CKD may therefore have carefully prescribed medication arrangements.

Care staff should:

- Administer or support medication only when trained, competent and authorised.
- Follow the prescription and Medication Administration Record (**MAR**) exactly.
- Never alter medication doses independently.
- Never give additional over-the-counter medicines unless this is permitted under the individual's medication arrangements and organisational procedures.
- Report suspected side effects, medication errors or concerns promptly.

Remember

Individualised care is particularly important for people living with chronic kidney disease.

Fluid, dietary, medication and monitoring requirements can differ substantially from one person to another.

Care staff should **follow the individual's care plan, observe for changes, record accurately and report concerns promptly** rather than making independent changes to the person's treatment or daily care arrangements.

Professional Responsibilities

Care staff have an important role in supporting individuals living with chronic kidney disease (**CKD**). Because the condition and its treatment can vary significantly between individuals, staff should understand the person's usual health, individual care plan and any specific clinical instructions.

As a care professional, you should always:

- Treat the individual with dignity, patience and respect.
- Know what is normal for the person's general health and wellbeing.
- Follow the individual's care plan and prescribed treatment arrangements.
- Follow any clinically prescribed fluid or dietary requirements accurately.
- Never introduce fluid or dietary restrictions independently.
- Support prescribed medication only when trained, competent and authorised.
- Never independently alter medication or treatment.
- Follow agreed weight, blood pressure, fluid-balance or other monitoring arrangements where required.
- Observe for changes in urination, swelling, breathing, appetite and energy levels.
- Record relevant observations and measurements accurately.
- Report significant changes promptly.
- Follow organisational escalation procedures and seek appropriate clinical assistance when required.

When to Raise Concerns

Report concerns promptly if the individual:

- Passes significantly less urine than usual or develops another noticeable change in urination.
- Develops new or increasing swelling of the feet, ankles, legs or hands.
- Becomes noticeably more breathless than usual.
- Develops persistent nausea or vomiting.
- Has significantly reduced food or fluid intake.
- Becomes increasingly tired, weak or generally unwell.
- Develops new or worsening confusion or changes in alertness.
- Experiences rapid or unexpected weight changes where weight monitoring forms part of the care plan.
- Has difficulty following prescribed fluid or dietary arrangements.
- Shows any other significant deterioration from their usual condition.

Care staff should follow the individual's care plan and organisational procedures for obtaining appropriate clinical advice.

When to Call 999

Some symptoms may indicate a **medical emergency**.

Call **999** if the individual:

- Develops severe or sudden difficulty breathing.
- Has severe chest pain or other symptoms suggesting a medical emergency.
- Collapses, loses consciousness or is difficult to wake.
- Develops a seizure when emergency assistance is indicated by their care plan or circumstances.
- Becomes suddenly severely confused or acutely unwell.
- Has symptoms that are rapidly worsening and you believe their life may be at risk.

If you are seriously concerned that an individual is experiencing a life-threatening emergency, **call 999 and follow emergency procedures**.

Fluid Balance and Swelling

Some individuals with CKD may experience fluid retention, which can contribute to swelling or breathlessness. Others may be at risk of dehydration.

This is why care staff should **not make assumptions about how much an individual should drink**.

Where fluid monitoring forms part of the care plan:

- Record fluid intake accurately.
- Record urine output where required.
- Follow any prescribed daily fluid allowance.
- Observe for significant swelling or changes in breathing.
- Report substantial changes according to the care plan.
- Never independently increase or decrease a prescribed fluid allowance.

Supporting Everyday Wellbeing

CKD can affect energy levels, appetite, mobility and emotional wellbeing. Care staff can help by:

- Allowing sufficient time for everyday activities.
- Providing appropriate rest periods.
- Supporting safe mobility and independence.
- Following the individual's nutrition and hydration plan.
- Supporting attendance at healthcare appointments where this forms part of their care.
- Listening to concerns and providing reassurance.
- Recognising changes in mood, confidence or ability.
- Promoting choice, dignity and involvement in everyday care decisions.

Good Practice Reminder

There is no single diet, fluid allowance or treatment plan that applies to everyone with chronic kidney disease.

Care staff should always work from the **individual's prescribed care plan and clinical guidance**.

Knowing what is normal for the person, observing changes carefully and **recording and reporting concerns promptly** are central to providing safe, person-centred support.

Summary

Chronic kidney disease (**CKD**) is a long-term condition in which the kidneys do not work as effectively as they should. It often develops gradually and may cause few noticeable symptoms during its earlier stages.

As kidney function becomes more reduced, individuals may experience symptoms such as tiredness, swelling, changes in urination, reduced appetite, nausea, itching or breathlessness. However, these symptoms can have many different causes, so care staff should **observe and report rather than attempt to diagnose**.

Care staff play an important role by understanding what is normal for the individual, following prescribed medication, nutrition, fluid and monitoring arrangements, recognising significant changes and escalating concerns appropriately.

Chronic Kidney Disease Awareness Checklist

✓ Know the individual's usual health, wellbeing and established symptoms.

✓ Follow the person's individual care plan and prescribed treatment arrangements.

✓ Observe for changes in urination, swelling, breathlessness, appetite and energy levels.

✓ Follow prescribed fluid and dietary arrangements accurately.

✓ **Never independently introduce or alter a fluid restriction or special diet.**

✓ Follow weight, blood pressure, fluid-balance or other monitoring arrangements where these form part of the care plan.

✓ Support prescribed medication only when trained, competent and authorised.

✓ **Never independently alter medication or treatment.**

✓ Record relevant observations and measurements accurately.

✓ Report significant changes from the individual's usual condition promptly.

✓ Recognise sudden or severe deterioration as potentially requiring urgent or emergency medical assistance.

✓ **Call 999 when a life-threatening medical emergency is suspected.**

Further Information

For further guidance on chronic kidney disease, visit:

NHS – Chronic Kidney Disease
https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/kidney-disease/

Kidney Care UK – Chronic Kidney Disease
https://www.kidneycareuk.org/

Kidney Research UK – Chronic Kidney Disease
https://www.kidneyresearchuk.org/

NICE – Chronic Kidney Disease: Assessment and Management
https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng203

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- Resource 007 – Preventing Dehydration in Care Settings
- Resource 013 – Care Home Resident Hydration Monitoring Guide
- Resource 028 – Medication Safety Awareness
- Resource 034 – Recognising Deterioration in Care Settings
- Resource 056 – Diabetes Awareness in Care Settings
- Resource 063 – Heart Failure Awareness in Care Settings

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