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World Kidney Day focuses on children

Family manages toddler's daily dialysis treatments while hoping for transplant

MONTREAL – Kidney disease is non-discriminating, affecting patients of all ages and circumstance. One in 10 people in the world, including Canada, suffers from kidney disease. International World Kidney Day, this year taking place on Thursday, March 10, helps to raise global awareness about the importance of kidneys to overall health and aims to reduce the frequency and impact of kidney disease and its associated health problems.

The number of Canadians being treated for kidney failure has risen dramatically in the past two decades. Throughout March – Kidney Health Month – The Kidney Foundation of Canada and its partners work to raise awareness of kidney disease, and the vital importance of organ and tissue donation.

One Hamilton, Ontario area family had its own crash course in learning about kidneys when their now two-year-old daughter was born with a rare condition called Renal Hepatic Pancreatic Dysplasia, which affects her kidneys and liver. The young girl was born with fluid-filled cysts covering both her kidneys.

When she was born in 2014, Olivia became one of Canada's youngest kidney patients. Nicole Pullen describes her daughter as her inspiration, "a Princess Warrior". She hopes the toddler with the bright smile and wavy strawberry blond hair will one day join playgroups with other children, and go to school. She longs to take Olivia swimming one day.

For now, the reality, though, is very different.

At just four weeks old, Olivia went into end-stage renal failure and was put on dialysis. She continues to be connected to a dialysis machine 12 hours each night. This is her 'life support' until she reaches the target size to receive a kidney transplant.

"It can be very overwhelming," says her mother, Nicole Pullen. "Our life has been at a standstill. I had to take a leave from my job due to Olivia's intense home care along with constant hospital appointments."

Kidney disease can affect young people in various ways, ranging from treatable disorders without long-term consequences to life-threatening conditions.

Nicole and her husband, Isaac, believe a kidney transplant is their best hope. It would free Olivia from nightly peritoneal dialysis treatments, and give her a new lease on life. She is currently undergoing medical assessments, and once that process is complete, the search will begin for a kidney match. Her parents will be tested as potential donors.

“We have been waiting for this since the day she was born,” Nicole says, of the transplant process. “It is what keeps me going, just knowing there is a goal we are getting to. Olivia needs to have a transplant to have somewhat of a normal life.”

Nicole is a strong advocate for organ donation, an objective shared by The Kidney Foundation of Canada which has set a goal to increase organ donation rates by 50% by 2020. To raise awareness, Nicole and her family are among the thousands of Canadians who take part in The Kidney Foundation’s annual walks, community-based fundraising events which take place across the country annually. Funds raised help to support innovative research and patient programs.

“Doing the Kidney Walk keeps us motivated,” Nicole says. “We get the whole family involved. It pulls everyone together.”

This year’s theme for World Kidney Day is *Kidney Disease & Children, Act Early to Prevent It!* The campaign aims to educate people about the effects of kidney disease on children and its causes, ranging from acute kidney injury and infection to genetic and hereditary diseases. For more tips on kidney healthy lifestyles, visit the World Kidney Day site at <http://www.worldkidneyday.org/> People are encouraged to move their feet, a simple action to think about the connection between healthy living and kidney health. World Kidney Day and its partners, including The Kidney Foundation of Canada, invite people to take a moment to learn more about the risks of kidney disease, and ways to stay healthy. Evaluate your risk by visiting www.kidney.ca/risk.

– 30 –

The Kidney Foundation of Canada is the 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 and commitment to advancing kidney health and organ donation.

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