Lack of Knowledge Regarding Women’s Health Issues in Kidney Patients – Results of a National Survey of Kidney Disease Professionals

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Abstract
The extent of caregiver knowledge regarding women’s health issues in kidney patients is not known. A survey document was sent to approximately 6500 NKF professional members, non-members & key opinion leaders in the NKF database via email. 238 people responded (4%). 196 (85.2%) were women, 14% were MD’s, 99% nephrologists, 59% held a social work degree, 24% were RNs or NPs. 164 (69%) worked in a dialysis unit, 74 (31%) in an Academic or Hospital setting. The majority of respondents reported over 50% of their patients were women (60.5%) & felt that women’s health issues were important (120, 52%) or very important (48, 20.6%). The majority (70%) felt confident or somewhat confident in their knowledge about general medical issues including cardiovascular disease, cancer screening, psychiatric & psychosocial issues. The majority (60-78%) felt somewhat or not at all confident regarding gynecologic issues, including reproduction, sexuality, hormone replacement therapy, contraception, ovarian failure, & gender disparities. Confidence in knowledge was assessed using a 4 point Likert scale: “Not At All Confident, Somewhat Confident, Confident and Very Confident”. Statistics were performed using SPSS v 20.0.

Methods
An anonymous 12 question survey was emailed to approximately 7000 unique people using a database supplied by the National Kidney Foundation of Greater NY. This database encompasses people throughout the United States, the Caribbean and Canada and is made up of members of the National Kidney Foundation as well as people who have expressed interest in the NKF or have attended a conference or symposium sponsored by the NKF of Greater NY. The questionnaire comprised questions regarding demographics, degree, and comfort with 10 areas of focus in women’s health, including cardiovascular disease, bone disease, gynecologic issues, including contraception, fertility and pregnancy, cancer screening, hormone replacement therapy, psychiatric issues, psychosocial issues, including family dynamics and adherence, nutrition and body image, endocrine issues including ovarian failure and diabetes, and gender related health care disparities including access to care and transplant-related disparities. Confidence in knowledge was assessed using a 4 point Likert scale: “Not At All Confident, Somewhat Confident, Confident and Very Confident”. Statistics were performed using SPSS v 20.0.

Results
The majority of respondents worked in a dialysis unit (69%), with 20% working in a clinic, 18% a Non-Academic Hospital and 13% an Academic Medical Center. There was a bimodal distribution to time in practice, with 30% having been in practice 1-5 years and 30% over 20 years, while the rest were evenly split between 5-10 years, 10-15 years and 15-20 years. 61% of respondents estimated that over half of their patients were women.

Background
The majority of studies looking at interventions in chronic kidney disease have not separated analyses based on gender, despite data suggesting that men and women differ in response to kidney injury, as well as in adaptation once kidney failure has occurred (1,2). The majority of recommendations by KDOQI or KDIGO are gender neutral, with no specific recommendations made regarding hormone replacement, treatment of bone disease, fertility, management and counseling regarding pregnancy and other issues specific to women.

It is not known how the lack of data in the literature affects health care providers comfort regarding their knowledge of these areas. We hypothesized that there was a general feeling of knowledge deficiency regarding women’s health issues in care givers who deal with kidney patients, and that there is a great need for increased research and education in this area, given that women constitute the majority of patients with chronic kidney disease at this time (3).

Conclusions
1. The survey respondents came from a wide geographic area and had a wide range of ages and backgrounds.
2. The majority of respondents felt lacking in specific knowledge areas, with the greatest being traditional women’s health topics, including bone disease, gynecologic and obstetric care and gender disparity issues.
3. A broad group of participants expressed interest in learning about these topics, with women more interested than men.
4. We recommend that increased funding for studies examining unique women’s health issues in the patient with kidney disease be allocated, and a national educational program regarding women’s health and kidney disease be created.

References