Downstate Launches GRADE Study to Find Best Treatments for Diabetes Only Site in Brooklyn to Offer National Clinical Trial

Did you know that diabetes-related deaths in many of the Brooklyn communities Downstate serves are among the highest in the city?

According to a new report issued by the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, the death toll from diabetes and its complications—including heart disease, stroke, and kidney failure—reached an all-time high in 2011.

Of the 10 community districts with the highest rates of diabetes-related mortality listed in the report, four are in Brooklyn: Bushwick, East New York, Bedford Stuyvesant, and Brownsville. In Community Board Districts 17 (East Flatbush) and 14 (Flatbush, Midwood), 256 deaths from diabetes or related causes were reported in 2011.

Here at Downstate, our physicians and researchers have made diabetes prevention and the search for better treatments a top priority. MaryAnn Banerji, MD, chief of endocrinology and director of the Diabetes Treatment Center, is the local principal investigator at Downstate for a national clinical trial launched in June aimed at finding the best combination drug treatment for diabetes.

The Glycemia Reduction Approaches in Diabetes Study (GRADE for short) is a national trial sponsored by the NIH’s National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases that will compare the long-term benefits and risks of four widely used diabetes drugs in combination with metformin, the most common front-line medication for treating type 2 diabetes.

“The GRADE study should be extremely valuable in helping us learn how to best treat and manage diabetes among Brooklyn residents,” says Dr. Banerji.

Volunteers are now being recruited for the GRADE Study at Downstate. If you or someone you know is interested in participating, call 718/270-1542 for more information.

Covering the Costs of Kidney Transplant Surgery

by Betty Jung, RN, Patient Educator Center for Community Health Promotion and Wellness

The cost of treatment for chronic kidney failure or end-stage renal disease can pose a significant financial burden on patients. At the April meeting of the Brooklyn Kidney Club, Hope Williams, LMSW, renal social work supervisor at Parkside Dialysis, and Marcella Ilori, transplant financial coordinator for the Division of Transplant, offered advice on financing kidney transplantation surgery.

“Many patients do not know what kind of insurance coverage they have,” says Ms. Ilori. As a first step, she helps them do a financial assessment and finds out what coverage they have or may qualify for.

The cost of a kidney transplant can vary from state to state and from hospital to hospital. Medical costs include insurance deductibles and co-pays, pre-transplant evaluation and testing, fees for the recovery of the organ from the donor, fees for the physician,

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Medical Mission to Tobago

In her discussion with President John Williams, Claudia Groome-Duke, Tobago’s Secretary of Health and Social Services, describes her plans to improve health care and disease prevention in Tobago.

Known within the global health community for the excellence of its health education, research, and patient care, Downstate is often visited by foreign dignitaries who wish to develop health initiatives in their country modeled on our own.

On May 6, the Honorable Claudia Groome-Duke, MSW, Tobago’s Secretary of Health and Social Services, toured University Hospital and met with President John Williams, hospital administrators, physicians, nursing staff, and the deans of CHRP and the School of Public Health.

One purpose of her visit, she said, was to learn about hospital operations and best practices here that might be implemented at Scarborough General Hospital, a new medical facility in the capital city of Tobago.

Ms. Duke views the new hospital as an important step toward achieving sustainable, self-sufficient healthcare delivery for Tobago. She explained that, previously, critically ill patients were flown to Trinidad for treatment, or had to make the two-and-a-half-hour trip by ferry.

The new hospital has modern diagnostic equipment and offers comprehensive ambulatory services; physicians can even access their patients’ medical records electronically. Still lacking, however, are nurses with advanced professional skills. Ms. Duke is interested in developing training that will prepare nurses in Tobago to care for a patient population with high rates of diabetes, hypertension, and cancer.

Ms. Duke’s visit was arranged by Stephen J. H. Isaac, a member of FM&D and vice president/chief public relations officer of the Tobago Progressive Association (TPA). Since 1999, Mr. Isaac and Avril Trancoso, RN, OPD Suite I, medical mission coordinator for TPA, have been organizing missions to Tobago.

“This summer, more than 40 health professionals will make the trip, including 10 from Downstate,” Mr. Isaac reported.

For the first time, several Downstate physical therapists have volunteered for the mission. One of them, Joanne Katz, PhD, DPT, chair of the Physical Therapy Program in the College of Health Related Professions, is an expert on physical therapy for children.

“I hope to speak to parents to show them how they can engage their children in therapeutic exercises in the home,” she said.

Several physicians and nurses, including patient-educator Sarah Marshall, MS, RN, will also be going to Tobago in July.

[We look forward to reporting on their experiences in the Downstate Times once they return—ed.]

Costs of Transplant Surgery (continued)

surgeon, radiologist, and anesthesiologist, anti-rejection drugs and other medications, and rehabilitation. Add to this such nonmedical expenses as transportation to and from the hospital for follow up care or a home aide, and the cost can easily exceed $2,500 a month.

The take-home message for members of the Brooklyn Kidney Club was: Be proactive and knowledgeable about your insurance coverage; pay your premiums on time; meet deadlines for recertification; and seek the advice of a knowledgeable social worker and financial coordinator in order to receive all the paid medical benefits to which you are entitled.