Renal professionals rely on a variety of resources to help educate stage 3–5 chronic kidney disease (CKD) patients about kidney disease and its treatments. One resource, developed by Life Options, takes a unique approach—by helping patients educate themselves. Kidney School (www.kidneyschool.org), an interactive online learning center, focuses on self-management skills and attitudes, as well as facts.

Kidney School has 16 modules written at the 7th–9th grade level. Access is free, 24 hours a day. Each module covers one topic and can be completed in about 30 minutes. The online modules are tailored: each user has a unique experience and can print a Personal Action Plan at the end of a module for review, personal goal-setting, and a reminder of questions for the care team. PDF versions of each module can also be downloaded.

Since its launch in 2002, Kidney School has become the nation’s largest CKD education program, with:

- 12,000+ unique visitors each month
- 35,000+ downloads per quarter
- 40,000+ referral postcard requests in 6 months

Research-based Design
Kidney School was created using research-based principles of adult learning and tested with patients prior to launch. Because adult learners want to choose topics that interest them, Kidney School is modular so users can choose topics in any order they prefer. The reading level was matched to the educational status of U.S. dialysis patients (most are high school graduates); adjusted downward by 3–5 grade levels in accordance with learning theory. The type size is large enough for visually-impaired readers—and adjustable via any web browser—and each page is short enough to maintain a comfortable pace.

Expert Review
All Kidney School content was based on published research and reviewed by a multidisciplinary expert team. And, Kidney School has earned Health on the Net (HON) certification as a reliable, trustworthy source of health information for people with CKD.

Messages of Hope
In addition to healthcare information, Kidney School includes key messages of hope and self-management. The importance of these messages has been established by research with long-term dialysis survivors, who actively self-manage their lives and their health. Kidney School encourages every patient to take part in positive self-management (continued on page S8)
In March, 2006 we sent an online survey to 150 dialysis professionals who requested free Kidney School postcards. More than 25% responded. Here’s what they told us:

**Professions of Those Who Recommend Kidney School**

- Nurses
- Social workers
- Techs/administrators
- Other
- Dietitians
- Nurses

**Most Recommended Topics***

- Treatment options 47%
- Nutrition and fluids 44%
- Living with CKD 36%
- Kidneys: how they work 36%
- Lab tests 31%
- Coping with CKD 28%

* Total >100% due to multiple responses

**Target Patient Groups***

- Current dialysis patients 80%
- New dialysis patients 75%
- Family members 62.5%
- Staff 57.5%
- Predialysis patients 55%

**Where Patients Use Kidney School***

- At home 67.5%
- Friend/family computer 27.5%
- Library 20%
- In clinic waiting room 7.5%
- At dialysis station 5%

**How Patients Benefit***

- Increased knowledge 95%
- More prepared for dialysis 56%
- Less fear (of dialysis/future) 54%
- Better diet and fluid control 54%
- Informed treatment choice 46%
- Improved attitude 44%
- Take meds as prescribed 26%

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Order free Kidney School postcard handouts online at www.kidneyschool.org. You can give the two-sided cards to patients and family members to let them know about Kidney School.
Reports from the Field: Kidney School in Action

Professionals rely on Kidney School to help them provide their patients with high-quality education. Here are reports about how some nurses, dietitians, and social workers use Kidney School:

Nurses

Valorie Paxton, RN, CNN, nurse educator for three DCI clinics in Missouri has referred her patients to Kidney School for 2 years. “I’ve been through the whole thing myself,” she said, “and I am very impressed.” Paxton uses the free postcards to make her patients—and colleagues—aware of Kidney School:

- Predialysis patients get a postcard in their education classes.
- Current patients and family members will find postcards in the lobby and on the bulletin board.
- Clinic staff can easily find the Kidney School URL on the postcard taped to her office door.

Paxton has printed all of the module PDFs and keeps them in a binder. She makes copies of individual modules or pages, as needed.

Lori Jewett, RN, dialysis coordinator at the Paul Gerry Dialysis Unit in Sayre, PA, is working on a systematic dialysis patient education program based on Kidney School. By the end of the year, nurses will go through Kidney School module by module. Jewett believes this will help standardize patient education and ensure that all patients receive comprehensive information about CKD and dialysis. At present, her clinic has Kidney School bookmarked on laptop computers patients can use during dialysis. And, they include Kidney School postcards in the CKD education packets for predialysis patients.

Kay Chapman, RN and Morna Williams, RN, University of Utah, PD program nurses, refer predialysis patients to Kidney School as part of their dialysis options class, and again when they’ve completed PD training, putting special emphasis on modules that may be most pertinent based on needs assessments done during training. Finally, they use Kidney School at monthly PD clinic visits. “I might send home a module printout to reinforce something I’ve taught,” noted Williams. Chapman, on the other hand, will log onto the site while a PD patient is getting IV iron. “We’ll go through the module together,” she said.

Melinda Martin-Lester, BA, RN, CNN, Director of Regulatory Compliance for Renal Ventures Management, LLC, plans to include Kidney School information in a CKD kit she is preparing for physicians. “We want to provide a list of resources they can use to improve education,” she said, “and Kidney School is an excellent resource.” She uses Kidney School herself as a quick reference, and most recently, printed the Staff Idea Guide for her clinic managers.

Dietitians

Janine Neiwirth, RD, serves two DaVita dialysis clinics in Idaho. She has created a poster encouraging patients and families to access Kidney School. In addition, she uses Kidney School to help her provide state-mandated nutrition education to all new dialysis clinic employees. “It’s a big help,” she said, “and new hires often come to me with questions after they review the nutrition module.”

Melissa Krentzman, RD, Lithonia Dialysis in Decatur, GA, prints out the nutrition module for her patients. “For some it is the first time they’ve heard that there would be dietary restrictions,” she said. “The menus are particularly helpful because they are specific for diabetics, and different modalities.”

Social Workers

Evelina Martin, LCSW, MSSW, University Medical Center, Lubbock, TX, refers all her pre-transplant and transplant patients to Kidney School. “The modules are manageable size,” she said, “there’s a lot of information without too much length.” Lately, she has been using the Sexuality and Fertility module with post-transplant patients. “It helps in the discussions of relationship issues,” she noted.

Stacy Ervin, MSW, works for Satellite Dialysis in northern California. Like many other professionals, she uses Kidney School to orient new staff to working in a dialysis clinic. “It is user-friendly and easy-to-understand,” she said. “It gives new employees a perspective on what patients are living with.”

Susan Kreuter, LCSW, North Beach Dialysis Center, Miami, FL, finds that Kidney School helps her patients talk with their loved ones about kidney disease and dialysis. “I encourage patients who don’t have Internet access to ask their children or grandchildren to help them with Kidney School because it’s a way to get the family involved and opens the door to conversation.” If she prints one module, even patients without computers find a way to go on to more modules. “It whets their appetite,” she said.

www.lifeoptions.org  www.kidneyschool.org
activities (and avoid negative ones) and includes those messages in each module.

“We created Kidney School to provide the in-depth self-management information patients need to survive with CKD—in a format that would not create a burden for busy healthcare professionals,” explained Dori Schatell, MS, Life Options Program Director.

**Proven Results**

Individually of all ages, races, and educational levels use Kidney School. Comments from those who complete the evaluation form at the end of each module have been overwhelmingly positive, and provide concrete evidence that Kidney School is meeting patients’ educational needs.

Overall satisfaction with Kidney School ranged from 92.2% to 96.9%, and users agreed that Kidney School was useful and included information they could apply in their lives. Perhaps most interesting, users with less education actually rated Kidney School significantly higher. These results suggest that Kidney School may have a positive impact on patients’ intent to self-manage, particularly among less educated and non-white users.

**References**

Kidney School™: Learn to Live Well on Dialysis

From lifestyle changes to medical choices, there is a lot to know when it comes to living with kidney disease! And, while it may be easy to give up control since you rely on so many people for care, learning as much as you can helps you take back control of your life.

Knowledge Is Power

Learning about kidney disease helps you recognize and report symptoms, decide what questions to ask, and begin to manage as many aspects of your care as possible. Studies have also shown that the more you know, the less fear you will have about the future.

This is where Kidney School comes in! Kidney School is an interactive, online learning program that can be found at www.kidneyschool.org. It’s free, and was designed to help you learn what you need to know to understand kidney disease and make good medical decisions—whether you are new to kidney disease or have been on dialysis for many years.

Featured Topics

Kidney School covers a wide range of topics, conveniently listed in a table of contents—you can go right to the information you need! Kidney School topics include:

- Kidneys: how they work, how they fail, what you can do
- Treatment options
- Working with your healthcare team
- Following your treatment plan
- Coping
- Anemia
- Understanding kidney lab tests
- Vascular access
- Nutrition and fluids
- Getting adequate dialysis
- Sexuality and fertility
- Staying active
- Heart health and blood pressure
- Rights and responsibilities
- Alternative treatments

How to Use Kidney School

Kidney School is user-friendly and allows you to take in information at your own pace. Some of the features of Kidney School are outlined in the graphic on page P4.

(continued on page P4)
Kidney School Is Prime Course for Education

Fifty-five year old Linda has a favorite saying: “Live in knowledge, not in fear.” For Linda, Kidney School started her on the path to knowledge about her kidney disease—knowledge she now shares with new kidney patients.

A New Beginning

Linda’s kidney problems started 35 years ago with a series of bladder infections. “I was 21 and newly married,” Linda recalls. “I went to a urologist who said it was a birth defect and that I would eventually have kidney failure.” Linda took medication to keep the infections at bay, and was monitored with lab tests. It was during this time that Linda and her husband adopted a daughter, now 25.

For 25 years, Linda’s kidney problems were kept at bay. That all changed with a visit to her doctor. “I went to the doctor for another health problem and mentioned that I was always feeling tired,” Linda reports. “My doctor ordered blood tests and found that my creatinine was very high.” Linda was referred to a nephrologist, who said that she would need to start dialysis within 6 months. “We continued to monitor my blood levels, and I didn’t start in-center hemodialysis for 2.5 years!”

Finding Kidney School

Linda started dialysis in March of 2002, and had concerns right away. “When you are first told you have kidney failure you think you can’t work or do anything—you think you are going to die,” Linda recalls. “I wasn’t sure I would live to see my first grandchild.”

Feeling hopeless, Linda went on-line to look for kidney support groups. “Many of the groups suggested I go to Kidney School,” Linda says. “I was depressed and thought I was alone—I didn’t know it was a common symptom until I went to Kidney School.”

Linda has found Kidney School to be “extremely helpful,” stating, “I can’t see how anyone would have any problems with the site or questions about what they’re reading, because the site is very clear and concise.” Linda especially likes the format of having a table of contents with modules listed by topic. “Right away you know where the answer to your question falls,” Linda relates. “There is no doubt in my mind that I would rate Kidney School #1 for kidney information.”
In 2005, armed with information, Linda started to consider home dialysis. “I really wanted to be able to go camping and didn’t want kidney failure to affect our lives too much,” Linda says. It was during this time that Linda received a kidney transplant.

**The Need for Education**

In addition to working as a receptionist at a veterinarian’s office, Linda works with the social worker at her dialysis center to educate new kidney patients. “We have come together to start a support group and offer new patient information kits,” Linda shares. “We are also putting together packets for physicians’ offices.” Recently, Linda started putting Kidney School cards in the new patient kits, stating, “Kidney School answers virtually every question about dialysis that I can think of! I appreciate that Life Options gives me the things I need for free.”

Linda is passionate about education for people with kidney disease. “I think you need to educate yourself so you can participate in decision-making,” Linda says. “Otherwise you won’t know if the decision being made is the right one for you. You need to know what’s going on.” Recalling her own experiences on dialysis before she became educated, Linda shares, “I just always assumed my blood work was okay since I didn’t hear otherwise—which is what most people do. Luckily I was fine, but I didn’t know enough to know what the values meant or what I should look for.”

Linda says people often ask her why she pushes education so much. Linda’s answer: “Without education you can’t take control. And I know I feel powerful when I know what’s going on!” Linda has also made it her mission to get the word out about kidney disease to the general public. “You can find asthma and diabetes information in your doctor’s office, but nothing on kidney disease,” Linda explains.

People aren’t aware about symptoms of kidney disease. If my doctor wasn’t wise enough to do a blood test when I said I was feeling tired, I may not have known about my kidney problems until I was worse off!”

**Sound Advice**

Linda offers new kidney patients the following advice: “When you are new to kidney disease, don’t panic! Gather support people and as soon as the shock wears off, go to support groups and Kidney School.”

With her first grandchild due in October, Linda feels her life would be much different had she not educated herself about kidney disease. “I wouldn’t have realized I could do all this without Kidney School and other support sites,” Linda says. “Now I know the hopeless feeling isn’t necessary—you can live perfectly well with kidney disease and still live to see your first grandchild!”
Thousands of patients have used Kidney School, offering such feedback as:

“This is a magnificent, informative, well-written, and fun website. You are able to project such a personal feel and personal involvement. Thank you!”

“Kidney School takes some of the fear and confusion about kidney failure away and makes life a lot less stressful.”

Computer Requirements

You need a computer to access Kidney School. If you don’t have a computer at home, try the library. Or, ask a friend or relative to help you log on so you can use Kidney School. If no one you know has a computer, ask a social worker or other health care staff member if they could print out a module for you.

You are the creator of your best possible health and life. Learning all you can at Kidney School is a great first step!