



The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and ESRD Networks Announce the “Fistula First” Initiative

“AV Fistulas should be the first choice for every eligible patient.”

- Cathy Lewis, RN, Chair of the Patient and Family Council of the National Kidney Foundation

Important Announcement

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) is pleased to announce an important new initiative called “Fistula First,” aimed at significantly increasing the use of AV fistulas (AVF) for hemodialysis access. The initiative will engage patients, vascular surgeons, primary care physicians, and all health care providers in changing practice to assure that AVFs are the first choice for every eligible patient.

Goals

The Fistula First project aims to fulfill the goals recommended by the National Kidney Foundation's Dialysis Outcomes Quality Initiative: AVF rates of 50% or greater for incident patients, and at least 40% for prevalent patients undergoing hemodialysis. This constitutes a significant increase over current national averages, which are 29% for incident patients and 31% for prevalent patients.

Current Rates

Current low rates of AVF use derive from a complex set of causes that are largely systemic – that is, not attributable to individuals, but rather, a property of the overall system. The treatment continuum for dialysis patients is complex and often fragmented. Improvement requires that a broad array of individuals, including clinicians, administrators, and payers, commit to working collaboratively to create better systems of care for patients.

The Goals Are Achievable

All across the United States, there are examples of providers who have achieved fistula rates in their patients well above the goals of this initiative. By harnessing the knowledge of the many disciplines whose care influences vascular access choices for patients, this project aims to create a new level of cooperation and communication across professional disciplines and care settings.

Who Is Involved

In addition to CMS, project partners include: the 18 ESRD Networks, dialysis providers across the country, nephrologists, vascular access surgeons, interventional radiologists, and interventional nephrologists. The Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) and Clinical Chair Lawrence Spergel, MD, have assisted in developing a package of 11 “change concepts” and are supporting the ESRD Networks as they develop and implement strategies for spreading the recommended changes.

For further information, contact your ESRD Network. A complete listing of ESRD Networks can be found at: <http://www.esrdnetworks.org/>. *Fistula First* is an initiative of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and the Department of Health and Human Services. Project assistance provided by the Institute for Healthcare Improvement.

