

## Changes to your dialysis schedule during COVID Pandemic

We are aware the COVID outbreak is a very challenging time for you, your family/carers and also your dialysis team. Despite this, your dialysis team are dedicated to maintaining a high quality and safe dialysis treatment for you.

During this COVID outbreak there may be periods of time when it would be beneficial for you to consider moving from three times per week dialysis to twice weekly dialysis. In addition to the personal benefit of reducing your potential exposure to the virus this change would provide your dialysis unit with flexibility to manage demand for dialysis due to the outbreak.

Switching to twice weekly dialysis **could only be considered for a small group** of patients whose risk of switching to twice weekly dialysis is low and would only be undertaken on a **temporary basis** with regular reviews. It would be expected that the reduction in dialysis from three times to twice weekly would usually continue for a maximum of approximately 3 months. Repeat reductions could be considered if further waves of infection occur, your consultant considers that it is still safe for you to do this and if you remain agreeable to this change.

Your dialysis Doctor or nurse will speak to you about such changes to your dialysis schedule and *together* you can decide what you and your family feel is best

If your dialysis team feel it is safe for you to reduce your dialysis sessions from three times a week to twice a week for a temporary basis during COVID, and you are happy to reduce your sessions you may be asked to come only twice a week.

### **What are the benefits?**

Because you will be coming less often, there is the possibility that you will have less exposure to the Corona virus, and this could mean a smaller risk of getting sick. But we don't know for sure that this is the case. It may also allow the dialysis unit staff to balance increased demand given staff absences to sick leave or self-isolation, to spend more time looking after other patients who may be unable to do twice weekly dialysis.

### **What are the risks?**

Not everyone can safely drop to twice a week, your dialysis team will review each person to make a decision on whether it is appropriate. Things they will look at are your potassium levels, your blood pressure and your fluid gains. This is to make sure it is safe for you to reduce to twice a week. The main risks of twice a week dialysis in the short term are potassium, higher blood pressure and fluid overload.

### **Things to think about:**

- This is only a temporary measure: you will be going back to your regular schedule as soon as best for you to do so. We know that in the long term 3 times a week is the best way to keep you well and healthy.

- It is always important to ensure you take your medications as planned, keep your fluid and salt intake low and keep to a low potassium diet, but when moving to twice a week these challenges are even more important.
- We will provide support and review this on a weekly basis discussing with you how you are feeling and managing at home in between dialysis sessions.
- You may have more frequent blood tests (to check your potassium level) before dialysis, this is to make sure your potassium is not high. These bloods will be done at the start of dialysis from your line or fistula.
- If your potassium level is high your dialysis team may recommend a new medicine called Veltassa to take to help lower your potassium. It is called a potassium binder, like a phosphate binder but for potassium. If you are on a phosphate binder you will need to take both binders. Fortunately, unlike phosphate binders you will only have to take this once a day. It binds potassium in your food so you don't absorb the potassium in your stomach.
- **How to take Veltassa:** It is a powder sachet which you empty into a cup and stir in around 40-80mls of water (about a quarter to half of a cup of water) the powder does not dissolve but is suspended in the water after you have stirred it you can drink it. Take this once a day. You can take this with food, but it is important not to take this medicine within 3 hours of your other medicines: ask your doctor if you have any more questions about this.
- As your safety is of utmost importance, it may be that you will need to go back to three times a week dialysis:
  - a. If your fluid gains are too high
  - b. If your potassium level is too high
  - c. If you feel more unwell on twice a week- let your nurse or doctor know if this is the case
  - d. If you feel that you have difficulty in managing the increased restrictions imposed by twice weekly dialysis. F

Please contact your dialysis unit if you have any further questions.