

STEMMING THE RISING TIDE OF KIDNEY FAILURE IN THE U.S.

Minntech's Roy Malkin Helps The Kidney TRUST Show the Way

For Roy Malkin, President and CEO of Minntech Corporation in Minneapolis, who brought the TRUST to Minnesota earlier this year for a corporate screening event, the outlook for his Renal Systems business over the next decade is quite strong, but he indicated that he would be more than happy to see a reduction in business growth, if the incidence of CKD could be reduced.

"Unless we take action as a society to step up prevention efforts, the number of people with kidney failure in this country, who will require dialysis or a transplant in their lifetime, is going to go through the roof," said Roy in a recent interview. "At Minntech we're doing everything we can to ensure that kidney disease prevention gets the attention it deserves."



Roy Malkin

Roy's commitment to kidney disease prevention is fueled by his own personal experience. His wife, who has diabetes, is a kidney and pancreas transplant recipient, and so he knows firsthand the consequences of kidney failure. "The transplants have been very successful," said Roy, "But it's been a long, hard road for my wife. For those of us who live with the consequences of kidney disease, it's not hard to be passionate about spreading the word to others." Roy currently serves on the board of directors of Bridge of Life, which brings chronic kidney disease and dialysis care to underserved areas around the world, and has previously been the honorary Kidney Walk chairman for the local chapter of the National Kidney Foundation.

Minntech manufactures and markets medical devices, sterilants, and blood and water filtration products, many of which are used in dialysis. The company employs approximately 400 people, most of them based in Minneapolis.

Roy recently was instrumental in bringing The Kidney TRUST's rapid-screening team to a company wellness event that was attended by almost 200 Minntech employees – as part of the event over 92 employees, including Roy himself, were screened for CKD.

Roy views his own employees as a captive audience, "The point that I want to hammer home with our team members is that CKD is, for the most part, a preventable disease. With early detection, you can head it off – and perhaps avoid kidney failure altogether. I personally deliver that message to our employees every chance I get. I also talk to my peers at other companies about it."

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For Roy and his colleagues at Minntech, kidney disease prevention is part of an overall focus on managing healthcare costs. "In addition to the human toll, there's a very practical economic incentive for us all in these types of prevention efforts," said Roy. By encouraging our employees to take charge of their health, including making regular visits to their primary care physicians, and supporting efforts to adopt a healthy lifestyle, Minntech has been able to hold the line on health insurance costs on both a company and an individual employee level at a time when health insurance expenses for most companies have been climbing year after year at a rapid pace.

"It's just good business," he said. "Investing money up front in prevention activities helps avoid catastrophic costs down the line. Major healthcare providers are getting the idea, and I'm hopeful that in the next ten years we'll see the federal government get on board in a big way. As a society, we're going to be spending countless billions on dialysis unless something is done to stop kidney disease in its tracks."

Roy concluded, "I've been so impressed by the innovative spirit of the TRUST team and their very practical approach to kidney disease screening. In the decade ahead I'd like to see the entire kidney disease community focus on getting the word out that this disease can be prevented. We need to do for kidney disease what others have done for cancer and heart disease – educate the medical community and the public so that screening for CKD becomes common practice. We must, at the very least, keep people from crashing into dialysis and help head off the consequences of kidney failure for millions of people in the years to come."

MOBILIZING THE PUBLIC AND MEDICAL COMMUNITY TO TAKE ACTION AGAINST CKD

A Conversation with Leading Nephrologist John Robertson

When Dr. John A. Robertson finished his residency at the University of Oklahoma Health Science Center and began his practice as a nephrologist in the 1980's, there wasn't a widespread appreciation in the medical community, much less in the public at large, for the number of people who had chronic kidney disease ("CKD"). Robertson says that strides have been made and knowledge has grown. "Over the years we've done a lot to educate doctors," says Robertson, "And we now have a staging program tool for kidney disease that was unknown when I entered the practice."

Today, Dr. Robertson is founder and partner with Nephrology Associates Medical Group in Riverside County, California – one of the three largest practices in the state with 19 kidney doctors and over 1,500 patients on dialysis receiving care in multiple DaVita dialysis facilities. He also has a long-standing relationship with DaVita Inc., currently serving as Vice President, Clinical Services – Office of CMO and as Medical Director of "ACE Acutes" – DaVita's in-hospital dialysis services in his inland region in California. In these capacities he has helped to develop DaVita programs that aim to reduce mortality associated with the start up of dialysis ("IMPACT") as well as "CathAway" which intends to remove dialysis catheters and replace them with dialysis fistulas which clearly improves long term patient clinical outcomes.

Although knowledge about kidney disease has increased over the last 20 years, along with the ability to treat it more efficiently and effectively, Dr. Robertson is concerned that public awareness about the threat of CKD, which can lead to kidney failure, lags far behind other diseases like cancer, diabetes, heart disease, and



John Robertson

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HIV/AIDS that have been effectively called to the public's attention by aggressive and well-financed awareness campaigns during the same time.

"In my view, we're facing a perfect storm of factors that make it urgent that we do a more effective job in bringing kidney disease to the attention of the public. The aging of the baby boomer generation and the obesity epidemic in America that is leading to greater incidence of diabetes are putting more and more people at risk for kidney disease," said Robertson. The latest statistics show that over 31 million Americans have kidney disease and research shows that only about 10% know that they have it.

Dr. Robertson thinks that people don't have an appreciation of how serious kidney disease can be and how life-changing it is when your kidneys fail and you are forced to rely on dialysis to stay alive. "It's not well known that mortality during the first year of dialysis is comparable to mortality during the first year after a cancer diagnosis," said Robertson. "The good news about kidney disease is that it's treatable if you catch it early and there are simple things that people can do to prevent or delay the onset of the disease and progression to kidney failure and dialysis. In addition, once dialysis is needed, we have many more dialysis tools to care for patients with kidney failure and as a result the risk of death on dialysis has dropped."

Dr. Robertson thinks that screening programs for CKD like the one that's been introduced by The Kidney TRUST over the last two years are an important tool in increasing awareness about the threat of the disease. He is impressed by the TRUST's rapid-screening approach that is being carried out in non-medical settings – along with learning their screening results onsite, participants receive materials that offer education about CKD and its prevention and are encouraged to seek medical follow-up as appropriate. "But screening is just the first step in getting people to take action and there's a lot of denial out there about the need to make lifestyle changes that's going to need to be overcome before we can make real progress," says Robertson.

"I think that we need to see more success stories – compelling accounts of people who have been able to change their lives. I think that the use of celebrities to get the word out is a powerful tool. The basketball star and kidney transplant recipient Alonzo Mourning has done a wonderful job of this in his home state of Florida," according to Robertson. "We need to do a better job of getting the word out in minority communities that are especially hard hit by kidney disease. I don't think that you can overestimate the power of honest, solid information. If the TRUST and other organizations can get the word out that early detection of the disease and lifestyle changes, as well as better care for the problems like hypertension and diabetes, can slow down the progression of kidney disease and ultimately keep people off dialysis, I think we'll be on our way to having an impact."

Dr. Robertson points out a number of issues that need to be taken into account when trying to turn the tide against kidney disease. "Kidney disease takes many forms and is perhaps harder to understand than some of these other diseases. The public and even many doctors are not as aware as they should be of the link between diabetes and kidney disease or the close connection between high blood pressure and heart disease and the risk of kidney disease. One of the most obvious lessons is that people with diabetes or high blood pressure should be monitoring their kidney health closely. One of the keys to making inroads is to make screening for kidney disease part of every person's regular healthcare inventory, along with cholesterol, blood glucose, blood pressure, as well as other tests for heart disease."

31 MILLION
ADULT AMERICANS
- HAVE -
**CHRONIC KIDNEY
DISEASE**
- AND -
**90% DON'T
KNOW IT**
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Dr. Robertson concluded, "Although there is no simple vaccine for CKD like the one that prevents common seasonal flu, kidney disease is easy to screen for and once detected, can be easily monitored and often slowed. Building public awareness is a crucial first step to winning the battle against CKD -- to prevent the tragic consequences of a storm one must first be aware that a storm is on its way."

TRUST'S FAP HAS MADE OVER 500 INDIVIDUAL GRANTS TO HELP PEOPLE ON DIALYSIS MANAGE MEDICAL COSTS

Over the past year the TRUST has piloted a financial assistance program for people on dialysis who are having trouble managing co-pays, co-insurance and deductibles for medical treatment, services, and prescription drugs. The recently-concluded Fall 2009 FAP Pilot was offered to residents of California, Colorado, District of Columbia, Maryland, Texas, and Virginia. Since the start of the program over 500 grants have been awarded and approximately \$1.2 million in funds committed to grant recipients.

According to TRUST President Barbara Lawson, "The TRUST believes that helping people on dialysis keep working and retain their insurance gives them more control of their health outcomes. And we think that health outcomes are going to be better if those on dialysis don't have to choose between spending their last few dollars every month on groceries versus co-pays for drugs."

The feedback from grantees has been very positive. One grant participant put it this way: "The grant was simply a godsend for me and the entire family. We were really struggling. I was starting to think about skipping some of the drugs I was supposed to be taking and splitting pills to make them last. With the grant, all the worry went away. It was really the missing piece of the puzzle."

Another participant from Colorado said, "The Kidney TRUST grant has meant so much to our family. It came at a time when medical bills were accumulating and money was running short. If it was not for this grant I do not know how we could have paid for my husband's medications." A California participant added, "The Kidney TRUST grant gave me peace of mind. After a difficult surgery, I knew that the cost of medications would not be an issue."

Although the Fall 2009 FAP pilot is over, the TRUST plans to reopen the financial assistance program in 2010. Visit our website at www.kidneytrust.org for future program announcements.

More information: www.KidneyTRUST.org Email: info@kidneytrust.org