

## Initiating dialysis improves symptom burden in patients and slightly improves in spouses: A longitudinal, multi-centre study

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### Background

Before initiating of dialysis, patients experience a high degree of symptom burden. However, little is known about initiating dialysis affects their symptoms over the first 90 days. Although patients' spouses are integral in their care, limited research exists which describes spouses' own symptoms or how their symptoms are affected by the patient starting dialysis. The aim of this study was to examine changes in symptom burden in patients and their partners over the transition from pre-dialysis to the first 90 days on dialysis.

### Methods

10 renal units in England took part in this observational, longitudinal study and recruited patients preparing to start either peritoneal or haemodialysis and their spouses. Data was collected at three time points: pre-dialysis (baseline, 83 couples), 45 days (follow-up 1, 42 couples) and 90 days after initiating dialysis (follow-up 2, 39 couples). At each time point, participants completed the POS-Symptom (patients: renal version; spouses: generic version). Multilevel modelling will be used to estimate the changes in symptom scores and test the relationship between baseline demographic variables and changes in symptom burden.

### Results

Preliminary descriptive statistics suggest there may be a significant reduction in symptoms in patients from pre-dialysis to 90 days (symptom severity:  $20.9 \pm 11.5$  vs.  $16.1 \pm 9.9$ ; number of symptoms:  $9.3 \pm 4.2$  vs.  $3.9 \pm 5.0$ ). Symptoms in spouses also seem to improve slightly over this transition period (symptom severity:  $9.3 \pm 8.7$  vs.  $8.4 \pm 7.4$ ; number of symptoms:  $4.7 \pm 3.6$  vs.  $2.3 \pm 3.3$ ). Figure 1 shows overall symptom severity to decrease (indicating less symptom burden) at 6 weeks which remains stable at 12 weeks. The figure indicates that spouses' symptoms do improve minimally over this time period.

At pre-dialysis patients reported weakness/lack of energy, drowsiness, poor mobility and itching as the most severe. Each of these improved after starting dialysis; however, pain worsened. At pre-dialysis, the spouses reported weakness/lack of energy, difficulty sleeping and pain as the most severe, but these did not change over time. Completed analysis with inferential statistics will be presented.

### Conclusions

This research is one of the first to investigate changes in symptoms in patients and their spouses over the transition onto dialysis and up to the first 90 days. These findings provide insight into the initial effects of dialysis in patients and their spouses. Understanding factors associated with changes in symptoms may help to prepare patients, and their spouses, for starting dialysis.