

Interview Transcript for Rural Hospital Dialysis Challenges

Dr. Syed Imam, a nephrologist who practices at OSF HealthCare hospitals says the consequences can be dire for patients who are facing life-threatening complications that occur in patients with advanced kidney disease, such as dangerously high potassium levels.

“Potassium is an electrolyte that is involved in the electrical rhythm of the heart and so it can really stun the heart if the potassium (is very high) and cannot be controlled in a timely manner. Dialysis is critical at that point. Sometimes we may be delaying care because the patient has to be transferred, and so it really helps if the dialysis is available and we can do it as soon as possible.” (:26)

Dr. Imam says keeping patients local and close to their support system is important.

“Family support is really, really instrumental at that time, (when initiating dialysis). Sometimes we have to pose the question, ‘Where do you want to go? Are you ok going to Peoria? and then they have the logistics (to worry about), a lot of issues come up that way and it really helps (if) the patients family members are around and if (the patient) can stay local.’ (:26)

Dr. Partha Srinivasan, a nephrologist who practices at OSF Hospitals says roughly 15% of hospitalized COVID-19 patients have kidney damage and many will need dialysis.

“It’s better to have them continue in the same institution, in the same room, rather than have to put them in an ambulance and transport ... putting a lot of people at risk for exposure to the virus.” (:09)

OSF HealthCare St. Mary Medical Center President Lisa DeKezel says she prioritized investing in dialysis equipment and training to meet a growing community need.

DeKezel stressed, “We have a population which we recognize as a diabetic population and those with chronic health conditions that require those dialysis services so it really made sense when we took a step back and looked at the needs of our community who we’re here to serve and we should be providing that service here at St. Mary Medical Center to keep our patients local.” (:22)

DeKezel says not having to move patients within the hospital or transfer them for care is so much better for them and their families.

“Bringing the equipment and nursing team to them to perform the service so that makes it much more convenient and less stressful for the patients as well.” (:09)

DeKezel says telemedicine will support newly trained members of the dialysis care team.

“We also have the opportunity to incorporate our telemedicine program. The dialysis team at Saint Francis (in Peoria) will be available real time via tele-support so they will be able to be virtually in the room with our dialysis team should there be a need that arises to tap directly into their mentors.” (:22)