

The Front Line of Challenging Times: COVID-19 Patient Engagement Tips for Dialysis Providers

The COVID-19 outbreak has significantly impacted the Nation and most of the world. Like many others, our patients are experiencing emotional distress related to the outbreak and increased burdens placed on them, their families, and their communities. Some of our patients have not adjusted well to changes implemented to help limit exposure and prevent the spread of COVID-19. As a result, these patients sometimes display combative behaviors, refuse to comply with facility policies, or question the facility policies.

It's important that we acknowledge our patients' concerns, help them understand physical and emotional components of this emerging concern, and ensure that they understand recent changes, as well as the benefits of complying with these changes. Because we know that implementing COVID-19 related policies and procedures has been challenging for some providers, the ESRD Network of Texas (Network 14) has created a short list of recommendations to assist providers.

- **Stay informed on the outbreak and changes to facility policies.** Communicate with your leadership team to ensure that your facility has updated information related to the outbreak as well as changes to your facility policies.
- **Educate patients on changes to facility policies and proper prevention techniques.** Explain changes to facility policies to patients as quickly as possible. Make sure patients understand these policies. Provide copies of the policies and refer to the policies when addressing patient concerns related to changes in the policies.
- **Anticipate possible reactions and responses.** For many patients, changes in facility policies have disrupted their norms. Practices such as wearing masks, visitation restrictions, and treatment floor restrictions have had a significant impact on our patients. When explaining policies and encouraging compliance be mindful of emotional distress and adjustment difficulties faced by patients.
- **Help patients identify and focus on areas of prevention and factors that they can control.** Encourage patients to continue preventative measures such as social distancing, sanitation practices, and hand hygiene in the community. Encourage patients to stay connected and stay active. *The use of technology can help with this.*
- **Use alternative forms of communication to stay connected with patients.** Many of our patients enjoy one-on-one interactions with staff members and other patients. Alternative forms of communication such as telephone contact, virtual meetings, and emails can help maintain patient engagement and alignment.
- **Have proper information to dispel myths.** COVID-19 is a relatively new disease and there are several myths related to the disease and how it spreads. Educate patients using information from your leadership team and reliable sources such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO).
- **Encourage those experiencing anxiety to limit media exposure to a single credible source.** Many patients use search engines to research information. This often results in several sources of information with varying content. Assist patients with locating credible, trustworthy, information.
- **Take care of yourself.** Be mindful of your mental and physical health. Try to do activities you enjoy. Ask for help when needed.

