

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Better care for kidney patients reduces Medicare costs, saves taxpayers money**

### ***Dialysis costly – \$288,000 per patient***

Medicare pays more than \$70 billion a year to manage Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD). However, Georgia Medical Care Foundation is working with state health care providers to improve patient care and reduce costly complications from the disease.

GMCF is one of only 11 organizations from across the country that has been chosen by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) to work on a new pilot project designed to help patients while saving taxpayers money.

“We are partnering with primary care physicians, nephrologists and vascular surgeons to improve care for patients with CKD to prevent or slow the progression of the disease,” explained JoVonn Hughley, manager of the CKD Quality Initiative. Medicare saves about \$288,000 for each patient who does not progress to dialysis, according to United States Renal Data System data.

Hughley said improving the health and well-being of CKD patients could have a substantial economic impact, considering Medicare beneficiaries with CKD account for 16.5 percent of Medicare costs in the year the disease is diagnosed, and 11.1 percent in the next year.

“We are confident that better care for kidney patients can lead to considerable cost savings, because it can mean less reliance on drugs, dialysis and hospitalization,” she said. The GMCF project encourages early detection of CKD and proper medications to slow the progression of the disease.

GMCF also supports a national effort called Fistula First, which addresses the need for patients who suffer from ESRD to have safer, higher-quality access to dialysis through a fistula. Hughley explained that a fistula is a "connection" surgically created by joining a vein and an artery in the forearm allowing blood from the artery to flow into the vein for safe and easy access for dialysis.

“Fistulas make a real, proven difference in the health of the patient and also save money. By providing a method of dialysis that is safer, longer lasting, and less likely to cause infection, fistulas are seen as the gold standard for vascular access,” said Hughley.

Fistulas reduce serious infections and complications leading to hospitalizations and mortality often associated with other forms of vascular access for kidney patients. Vascular access complications account for 16 to 25 percent of all hemodialysis patient admissions, contributing to about \$1.5 billion in Medicare costs annually. Fistulas also cost less to maintain than other forms of access and are associated with less rework and complications requiring hospitalization.

GMCF is the Medicare Quality Improvement Organization (QIO) for Georgia. QIOs work with health care providers, consumers and stakeholder groups to refine care delivery systems to make sure all patients – particularly patients from underserved populations – get the right care at the right time.

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