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Addressing the Issue: Sexual Health of Patients with Chronic Kidney Disease

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Background

Sexual dysfunction is a common, multifactorial problem affected by various physiological and psychological factors associated with the progression of chronic kidney disease (CKD). The interprofessional team needs to be knowledgeable of the causes and complications of CKD and identify barriers and strategies in addressing the sexual health of patients with CKD.

Problem

Sexual dysfunction continues to remain underrecognized and undertreated. As male and female patients progress through various stages of CKD, sexual function may deteriorate, impacting one's sexual health. In men, worsening uremic symptoms may be associated with erectile dysfunction and decreased libido. In women, menopause may occur up to five years earlier in women with CKD than in otherwise healthy women.

Discussion

Multiple factors contribute to sexual dysfunction in patients with CKD, such as comorbidities, psychosocial factors, hormonal disturbances, anemia, body image changes, neuropathy, and medications. Numerous studies discuss using counseling, hormonal therapy, performance enhancers, phosphodiesterase inhibitors (PDE5), and renal transplant as alternatives to traditional treatment to improve sexual health for patients with CKD.

Outcome

To help manage the sexual health of patients with CKD, the interprofessional team needs to identify barriers (e.g., stigma, personal issues, complexities with having the "talk") regarding sexual health. Strategies to help address sexual health include educating on CKD and sexual dysfunction, building a rapport, arranging an appropriate time and setting to have effective open-communication, and identifying medical treatment for sexual dysfunction.

Conclusion

Education and training in sexual health can help translate the knowledge of nephrology into practice and increase nephrology nurses' confidence in initiating sexual health-related discussions with patients. Nephrology nurses should also be aware of treatment alternatives used in improving sexual quality of life, relationships, and overall well-being for patients with CKD.

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