

**FORUM OF ESRD NETWORKS**  
**CMS / EDAC / FORUM LEADERSHIP CALL**  
**CALL NOTES**

MONDAY, MARCH 8, 2021  
2:00 PM ET

**FORUM EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE & NETWORK DIRECTOR ATTENDEES:** *(those highlighted are confirmed as attending)*

**Ralph** Atkinson, MD – President  
**David** Henner, DO – President-Elect  
**Donald** Molony, MD – Past-President  
**Kam** Kalantar-Zadeh, MD, MPH, PhD – MAC Chair  
**Derek** Forfang - KPAC Co-Chair  
Dawn Edwards – KPAC Co-Chair  
**Andrew** Howard, MD, FACP – Board Member  
John Wagner, MD – Board Member  
**Network 1**  
Network 2  
**Network 3/4**  
Network 5  
Network 6  
**Network 7 / 15 / 17**  
**Network 8**  
Network 9  
**Network 10**  
**Network 11**  
**Network 12**  
**Network 13**  
**Network 14**  
Network 16 / 18  
Kelly Mayo, ESRD NCC  
**Dee** LeDuc - Forum Staff

**CMS ATTENDEES:** *(those highlighted are confirmed as attending)*

Anita Monteiro – Acting Group Director, iQIIG  
Paul McGann - Chief Medical Officer for QI, iQIIG  
**Shalon** Quinn –Director, Div of Kidney Health, iQIIG  
**Melissa** Dorsey –Dep Dir, Div of Kidney Health, iQIIG  
Todd Johnson –Regional Program Mgr, Div of Kidney Health, iQIIG  
Jesse Roach, MD – Medical Officer, CMS  
Ekta Brahmhatt – QSOG, CMS  
Ed Huff  
**Steven** Preston  
**Lisa** Rees  
Johannes Hutaaruk  
Jennifer Milby  
**Filita** Long  
**Daniel** Thompson  
**Christina** Goetee

**WELCOME:** Dr. Quinn and Dr. Atkinson

The call convened at 2:01 pm ET

**CMS UPDATES:** Ms. Quinn

Dr. Quinn shared CMS had convened an executive session following the CMS Quality Conference to discuss kidney transplantation. Dr. Mohan was invited as the keynote speaker and a number of renal related organizations attended, including leaders from the OPOs, transplant centers, donor hospitals and patients. Dr. Atkinson thanked CMS leaders in the QMVG group for meeting with Forum leaders on February 11<sup>th</sup> to begin discussions about ESRD measures. He also acknowledged CMS for a successful CMS Quality Conference and NPFE LAN Conference.

The Forum continues its work to address health equity and disparities affecting ESRD patients, especially in light of findings of the remarkable disparities during the COVID pandemic. Recognizing that data is being collected on these topics and available at the ESRD NCC level, Dr. Atkinson asked Dr. Quinn if CMS would consider a presentation of this data to Forum leaders in the future. He offered the Forum's Board of Directors would be meeting on March 24<sup>th</sup> and could provide time on the agenda for a presentation.

**ACTION:** Dr. Quinn will take this request back to her team to determine if a presentation could be provided.

**PRESENTATION:**

“Forum Resources supporting Network Vaccination Activities”

Dave Henner, DO; Kam Kalantar, MD, MPH, PhD; Ralph Atkinson, MD

Dr. Henner thanked Dr. Quinn for her assistance in introducing Forum leaders to the QMVG leadership (Jesse Roach, Michelle Schreiber, Delia Houseal).

Dr. Henner acknowledged Dr. Ramin Sam, MAC Member, for his lead on the 2020 updates to the Forum MAC Vaccination Toolkit. He reviewed 2020 updates to the Toolkit including a demonstration of the Vaccination Tracking Tool and the 2021 additions of PPSV-23 and COVID-19 Vaccine. MAC members are currently updating the Toolkit again to include a section on the COVID-19 vaccine and PPSV-23. These updates will help support the work of the ESRD Networks in the coming years.

Dr. Kalantar acknowledged the disparity across the country related to kidney patient access to the vaccine. He reviewed the status of the vaccines currently available in the U.S. and those expected in the months to come. It is the MAC goal, to keep the Vaccination Toolkit and all of the MAC Toolkits current as a resource to support the work of the Networks in providing quality care to kidney patients.

**COVID-19 RELATED TOPICS:**

**Articles:** Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Excess Deaths Among Persons with Kidney Failure During the COVID-19 Pandemic, March-July 2020; D. Kim, et. al.

[https://www.ajkd.org/article/S0272-6386\(21\)00069-X/fulltext?dgcid=raven\\_jbs\\_aip\\_email](https://www.ajkd.org/article/S0272-6386(21)00069-X/fulltext?dgcid=raven_jbs_aip_email)

**1) Transplant Metrics:**

[03/08/2021]

Referencing UNOS data as of 2/28/2021, total adult kidney transplants to date in 2021 are tracking similar to 2020 for the same time period. While living donor transplant are slightly behind 2020 totals, deceased donor transplants exceed both 2020 and 2019 totals. Waitlist totals increased for the week of 2/28/2021 and are now greater than 1000 new weekly additions to the waitlist as of 3/7/2021. The percentage of active patients on the waitlist is slightly less than this time in 2020 and the percentage of inactive due to COVID appears to be stable at just 1%.

Dr. Howard acknowledged the announcement from CMS on Friday, March 5<sup>th</sup>, that the start date for the KCC voluntary models will be delayed from April 1, 2020, to January 1, 2022. There was no mention of the ETC Model or an extension of the ESCO which will create a gap year for providers currently active in the ESCO model requiring unexpected, delayed entry into MIPS. He inquired with CMS leadership if there is news on the status a potential extension of the ESCO through the end of 2021.

**ACTION:** Dr. Quinn did not have information about this but offered to reach out to CMMI leaders to gather more information.

## 2) **Kidney Patient Observations:**

[03/08/2021]

**New Patient Resource:** “Kidney Patients & the COVID-19 Vaccine”

<https://esrdnetworks.org/resources-news/covid-19-information-resources/resources-for-kidney-patients/>

Mr. Forfang shared patient frustrations with the disorganization of vaccine roll-out to the kidney dialysis and transplant population. The disparity of roll-out between states and counties within states has been a great concern to patients. He shared, as part of his work with the NKF, letters were sent to State Governors regarding these concerns and have been effective in prioritizing kidney patients for the vaccine.

The KPAC will be partnering with the ESRD NCC on a webinar planned for March 16<sup>th</sup> which will include a panel of kidney patients sharing their experiences receiving the vaccine and encouraging their fellow patients to accept the vaccine when it becomes available to them. The webinar will be recorded and uploaded to the Forum’s new YouTube channel.

The KPAC has also developed a new flyer for patients regarding the COVID vaccine to provide factual and encouraging messages to kidney patients. Mr. Forfang acknowledged Ms. Edwards and the KAPC subcommittee for their work on this project.

**ACTION:** Ms. Rees asked the Forum to share the flyer with the ESRD NCC and Networks to help distribute the resource.

## 3) **Observations, Updates, and Concerns from Hot Spots:**

[03/08/2021]

Mr. Brown shared that as of this reporting, more than 100,000 total dialysis patients in the U.S. (1 in 5) have been affected by COVID. While the total number of positive cases of COVID continues to increase slightly, the dramatic increases seen in previous weeks has subsided and some states are beginning to see a leveling off. As of this reporting, there are 46 states with >100 COVID+ cases per 1000; the national rate currently at 201.6. A bright spot in the raw data shows that only 1 state in the past 6 weeks has seen the highest net new weekly cases for their region; the remaining states remain either at or below their net high number since April 2020.

Q: Do we know if the higher sustained mortality among dialysis patients is still showing up, what are the trends?

A: The mortality data available currently is incomplete so it is unclear if the trends continue. As data continues to be collected, it’s possible that question could be answered. Will continue to monitor reports from USRDS as well.

Acknowledging the impact of COVID-19 on kidney patients and the desire to better understand this impact to prioritize and plan for the future, Dr. Kalantar offered the assistance of the Forum to partner and thoughtfully publish a summary of the findings related to the CKD/dialysis population. Dr. Quinn reported that CMS continues to monitor data and is also considering options, determining the data available and what may be published.

## 4) **COVID Testing & Vaccination Priority for Kidney Patients:** Incenter dialysis is a congregate care situation similar to prisons and nursing homes and could benefit greatly from the use of more frequent, rapid-results testing.

[03/08/2021]

Ms. Vinson presented a summary of the weekly positivity rates as of 3/3/2021 from the NHSN database. The national positivity rates for dialysis patients as of 3/3/2021 has decreased to 38.62%, the lowest rate since September 2020. The cumulative positivity rate for dialysis patients remains about the same at 56.08%. (The cumulative national positivity rate for the general population is 7.97%.)

**5) Network Observations related to Contract Mods:** On behalf of the ESRD Networks, Ms. Vinson and Ms. Avery present observations and comments from the Networks.

[03/08/2021]

Beginning this week, Networks will begin reporting patient and provider vaccination data to CMS using reports downloaded from the CDC COVID module. On behalf of the Networks, Ms. Vinson inquired about whether CMS will provide Networks with national summary data. Ms. Reese confirmed CMS will be providing national data back to the Networks. Ms. Vinson reported Networks continue the Technical Assistance work and are observing a few facilities still working through the process to gain access to NHSN, but rates continue to improve.

**6) Tracking Nursing Home residents in EQRS:** CMS is working on this, any updates to share?

Lisa Rees reported CMS continues to work on this request.

[06/03/2020] Ms. Rees shared that she continues to work with ISG on this issue. Although the updates will not be part of the Fall 2020 EQRS roll-out, she expects the updates to follow soon after.

**7) Tracking Lessons Learned and Preparing for Future Surges:** What can the Forum and Networks do to support CMS in preparing for future COVID surges?

- a. Nurses and PCT shortages in hot spots
- b. Transportation of COVID+ Patients
- c. Shortage of CRRT Fluids & Supplies
- d. Vascular Access
- e. Variability in Infection Control Surveys
- f. Data Reporting at the national level
- g. Telehealth Waivers
- h. Triage of COVID+ Patients
- i. Monitoring COVID-19 recovering and treating ESRD patients
- j. Transparency of sharing COVID-19 test results between dialysis facilities/healthcare providers and nursing homes

Next call: Wednesday, April 7 at 4pm ET.

Dr. Molony thanked Dr. Quinn and her staff for their assistance in Texas during the recent snowstorms and federal emergency, helping to coordinate the work of the TEEC.

The call adjourned at 2:55 pm ET