

‘Standing together in the face of COVID-19’: the experiences of the kidney failure triad – patients, family, and healthcare professionals – during the pandemic

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Patients with kidney failure are exceptionally vulnerable to serious complications from SARS-CoV-2 as they combine multiple risk factors (e.g., less efficient immune system). Patients on hemodialysis need to travel to a dialysis unit 3 to 4 times a week to receive renal replacement treatment, adhere to complex dietary and fluid restrictions, care for the vascular access, practice exercise, and take different medications to maximize treatment adequacy and quality of life. All these requirements are crucial for survival but may represent an additional challenge to manage during the COVID-19 outbreak, affecting patients and their close family members who provide the bulk of support. The pandemic has also increased the complexity of the requirements to prevent and control the spread of the virus in hemodialysis centers, which can put healthcare professionals under exceptional pressure. The Together We Stand project investigated the experiences of patients undergoing in-center hemodialysis, family caregivers, and dialysis care professionals during the current pandemic using a mixed-methods approach. Results showed that COVID-19 brought several challenges for patients (e.g., electrolyte imbalances; difficulties managing dietary and fluid restrictions, increased isolation; fear of severe complications from COVID-19), caregivers (e.g., fear of contaminating the patient; additional care responsibilities, such as transporting patients to and from the dialysis center), and healthcare professionals (e.g., increased work overload; emotional exhaustion; interference with family life). Participants also expressed greater psychological distress, with family caregivers reporting increased burden and symptoms of depression that predicted a poorer quality of life. These results were published in renowned scientific journals in the field of Nephrology and presented at the ISN World Congress of Nephrology 2022, receiving great attention from the scientific community and social media.

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FIGURE 1

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the kidney failure triad.

