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## Renal Support Network Travels to the Nation's Capitol *WeKAN Program Visits 136 Congressional Offices*

LOS ANGELES, CA (May 22, 2008) – On May 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> thirty-two members of the Renal Support Network's Wellness & Education Kidney Advocacy Network (weKAN) walked the halls of the nation's Capitol delivering a message to 136 members of Congress to support the Kidney Care Quality and Education Act of 2007 (H.R. 1193 and S. 691) and the Comprehensive Immunosuppressive Drug Coverage for Kidney Transplant Recipients Act (H.R. 3282 and S. 2320). Through the efforts of the weKAN advocates, several members of Congress agreed to support these two bills, join the Kidney Caucus and visit a dialysis facility. In addition, WeKAN members discussed the topic of Bundling of Dialysis Services, and the potential impact on patients if this proposed reimbursement revision is not properly designed and monitored.

Consisting of patients, family members and supporters representing twenty-one states, weKAN members led this intensive effort to let patients' perspectives be heard in Congress. By raising their voices, weKAN patient activists brought their personal experience to the meetings and illuminated ways in which elected officials can help people who have chronic kidney disease.

Questions and answers flowed easily as the discussions centered on six issues of concern to patients with kidney disease, including the need for:

- Educating patients with kidney disease before they require dialysis (it is now estimated that up to 26 million people in the United States may have kidney disease).
- Mandating consistent training and certification for the dialysis technicians who care for patients on dialysis (many states require no training for these individuals).
- Understanding the barriers that may prevent patients from choosing home dialysis.
- Highlighting the need for an annual inflation-based reimbursement update for the dialysis program (the only Medicare program that does not currently have such an update).
- Underscoring the importance of continuing to pay for the immunosuppressant medications that allow patients with kidney transplants to retain their transplants (currently, reimbursement stops after 3 years, and many patients are then at risk for transplant rejection and a return to dialysis).
- Ensuring that patient quality of care and quality of life are protected if reimbursement is changed to an expanded bundling of dialysis services. (More information on patient's concerns with bundling can be found at [www.rsnhope.org](http://www.rsnhope.org).)

President and Founder of Renal Support Network Lori Hartwell said, "The continuing success of the weKAN visits to Capitol Hill revolves around a recurring sentiment expressed by legislators that patients carry with them a credibility that only someone who has lived with a chronic illness can bring to the table." Hartwell continued, "It is encouraging to know elected officials want to hear our stories and on many occasions share their own experiences with someone they know who has been diagnosed with chronic kidney disease."

(more)

Kathe LeBeau, kidney patient and coordinator of the weKAN program, felt rewarded by the experience. She said, "It's wonderful to see these advocates, who have worked all year long on advocacy issues, get the chance to connect with their representatives on Capitol Hill and feel listened to and respected. The level of motivation and excitement among the patient activists following their meetings was inspiring. They see that weKAN make a difference!"

Dawn Dungan, a weKAN patient activist said, "My Senator's legislative aide and I have been successful at building a relationship, so when she told me to say she was traveling through my state and wanted to meet me for a dialysis unit visit, I was truly grateful for her willingness to listen to and see firsthand the impact of CKD issues on the patients."

This marks the fourth year that RSN has organized patients to visit DC together from all across the United States. WeKAN members are standing up and being heard as a powerful voice for kidney patients.

RSN visited the following offices and met with either elected officials or their Health Legislative Aides:

### **Senators**

Sen. Tom Coburn R-OK, Sen. James Inhofe R-OK, Sen. George Voinovich R-OH, Sen. Sherrod Brown D-OH, Sen. Gordon Smith R-OR, Sen. Ron Wyden D-OR, Sen. Benjamin Cardin D-MD, Sen. Barbara Mikulski D-MD, Sen. Debbie Stabenow D-MI, Sen. Carl Levin D-MI, Sen. Barack Obama D-IL, Sen. Richard Durbin D-IL, Sen. Jon Kyl R-AZ, Sen. John Kerry D-MA, Sen. John McCain R-AZ, Sen. Michael Enzi R-WY, Sen. John Barrasso R-WY, Sen. Kent Conrad D-ND, Sen. Wayne Allard R-CO, Sen. Ken Salazar D-CO, Sen. Barbara Boxer D-CA, Sen. Dianne Feinstein D-CA, Sen. Charles Schumer D-NY, Sen. Hillary Clinton D-NY, Sen. Kit Bond R-MO, Sen. Claire McCaskill D-MO, Sen. Bill Nelson D-FL, Sen. Mel Martinez R-FL, Sen. Bob Corker R-TN, Sen. Lamar Alexander R-TN, Sen. Arlen Specter R-PA, Sen. Tom Harkin D-IA, Sen. Joe Biden D-DE, Sen. Charles Grassley R-IA, Sen. Tom Harkin D-IA, Sen. Robert Casey D-PA, Sen. Jon Tester MT, Sen. Max Baucus D-MT, Sen. John Cornyn R-TX, Sen. Mark Pryor D-AR, Sen. Robert Menendez D-NJ, Sen. Frank Lautenberg D-NJ.

### **Representatives**

Rep. Albio Sires D-NJ, Rep. Bill Pascrell D-NJ, Rep. Donald Payne D-NJ, Rep. Frank Pallone Jr D-NJ, Rep. Mike Ross D-AR, Rep. Vic Snyder D-AR, Rep. John Boozman R-AR, Rep. Darlene Hooley D-OR, Rep. Ron Paul R-TX, Rep. Sam Johnson R-TX, Rep. Dennis Rehberg R-MT, Rep. Steve King R-IA, Rep. Leonard Boswell D-IA, Rep. Bruce Braley D-IA, Rep. Dave Loebsack D-IA, Rep. Tom Latham R-IA, Rep. Mike Doyle D-PA, Rep. Joseph Pitts R-PA, Rep. Allyson Schwartz D-PA, Rep. Todd Platts R-PA, Rep. Phillip English R-CA, Rep. Edward Whitfield R-KY, Rep. Steve Cohen D-TN, Rep. Lincoln Davis D-TN, Rep. Marsha Blackburn R-TN, Rep. John Tanner D-TN, Rep. Zach Wamp R-TN, Rep. Ron Klein D-FL, Rep. Kendrick Meek D-FL, Rep. Clifford Stearns R-FL, Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtenen R-FL, Rep. Gus Bilirakis R-FL, Rep. Roy Blunt R-MO, Rep. Wm. Lacy Clay D-MO, Rep. Kenny Hulshof R-MO, Rep. Kirsten Gillibrand D-NY, Rep. Brian Higgins D-NY, Rep. Michael McNulty D-NY, Rep. Anthony Weiner D-NY, Rep. Maurice Hinchey D-NY, Rep. Thomas Reynolds R-NY, Rep. Eliot Engel D-NY, Rep. Devin Nunes R-CA, Rep. Ed Royce R-CA, Rep. George Radanovich R-CA, Rep. Elton Gallegly R-CA, Rep. Wally Herger R-CA, Rep. Gary Miller R-CA, Rep. Stark D-CA/Rep. Charlie Rangel D-NY, Rep. Adam Schiff D-CA, Speaker Nancy Pelosi D-CA, Rep. Henry Waxman D-CA, Rep. Xavier Becerra D-CA, Rep. Earl Blumenauer D-OR, Rep. Mark Udall D-CO, Rep. Doug Lamborn R-CO, Rep. Diana DeGette D-CO, Rep. John Salazar D-CO, Rep. Ed Perlmutter D-CO, Rep. Thomas Tandrodo R-CO, Rep. Barbara Cubin R-WY, Rep. John Shadegg R-AZ, Rep. Raul Grijalva D-AZ, Rep. Barney Frank D-MA, Rep. Richard Neal D-MA, Rep. Steven Lynch D-MA, Rep. Rick Renzi R-AZ, Rep. Ray LaHood R-IL, Rep. Janice Schakowsky D-IL, Rep. Mark Kirk R-IL, Rep. Vernon Ehlers R-MI, Rep. Candice Miller R-MI, Rep. Greg Walden R-OR, Rep. Peter DeFazio D-OR, Rep. David Wu D-OR, Rep. Joe Baca D-CA, Rep. Lois Capps D-CA, Rep. Jerry Lewis R-CA, Rep. Deborah Pryce R-OH, Rep. Stephanie Tubb-Jones D-OH, Rep. Patrick Tiberi R-OH, Rep. Frank Lucas R-OK, Rep. Tom Cole R-OK, Rep. John Sullivan R-OK, Rep. Mary Fallin R-OK, Rep. Dan Boren D-OK, Rep. Anna Eshoo D-CA, Rep. Jane Harman D-CA, Rep. Maxine Waters D-CA.

**About the Renal Support Network**

The Renal Support Network (RSN) is a nonprofit, patient-focused, patient-run organization that provides non-medical services to those affected by chronic kidney disease (CKD). RSN strives to help patients develop their personal coping skills, special talents, and employability by educating and empowering them (and their family members) to take control of the course and management of the disease. A vital role of RSN is to provide lawmakers and policymakers with the patient's perspective on the needs and capabilities of people living with CKD. The Renal Support Network values people with kidney disease and helps them become self-sufficient through education, advocacy, and hope for a better tomorrow.

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