9 March 2016

World Kidney Day 2016 – Act early and prevent it!

When 16-year-old Levi Van Eck started complaining of tiredness and a sore throat, his mum Rosemarie never imagined the Mudjimba teenager was suffering kidney failure.

“It was a huge shock when he was diagnosed with kidney failure, I remember being at the hospital and saying, no, I just thought he had the flu!” she said.

Doctors told Levi his kidneys were only functioning at around 10 per cent. He was in urgent need of a kidney transplant and had to start dialysis immediately. For three days a week the year eleven student would catch his school bus to Nambour General Hospital for dialysis, until a suitable donor was found.

Mum Rosemarie didn’t think twice about putting her hand up to be a possible match to donate one of her kidneys to her son.

“Levi and I are very similar in a lot of ways, from appearance to personality and I just had this inkling that if anyone was going to be a compatible family member it would be me,” Rosemarie said.

Her motherly instinct proved to be right, and Rosemarie was a positive match for her son Levi.

“I quit smoking straight away and I went on to pass all the necessary tests, and eight months later I was able to go through with the operation.”

In June 2015 surgeons removed one of Rosemarie’s kidneys, and successfully transplanted it to Levi. His recovery was almost instant.

“I remember walking up after the operation and immediately asking ‘how is Levi?’ and I heard this voice say ‘Mum, I’m here’. He was up and walking around already, it was incredible.”

Both mother and son have successfully recovered from the operation. Rosemarie is back at work in aged care and Levi is now studying a Bachelor of Business at the Queensland University of Technology in Caboolture.

“It’s so incredible to think that I did save my boys life. I was able to give life to Levi twice. We are very grateful to the doctors and nurses who have taken care of us” Rosemarie said.

Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service Director of Renal Services Associate Professor Nicholas Gray says while kidney disease in children is rare, it’s important to maintain a healthy lifestyle from childhood to reduce the risks of the disease later in life.

“The best way is to maintain a healthy weight by eating nutritious foods with correct portion sizes. Avoiding sugar where possible and increasing exercise will also reduce the risk of being overweight, developing diabetes and kidney disease later in life,” he said.
Kidney disease affects around 10 per cent of adults, yet remains under-recognised and poorly understood by many in the community. A/Prof Gray says the symptoms of kidney disease can be hard to recognise.

“People aged over 60 years are most at risk. Smokers and those with diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity or a family history are also at risk, as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.”

“I would encourage anyone with a risk factor for kidney disease to be checked by their GP. The check is simple and involves a blood pressure measurement, blood test and urine test.”

World Kidney Day (10 March) this year is focusing on Kidney Disease and Children, its urging Australians to act early and prevent it.

MEDIA OPPORTUNITY:

Media are invited to meet and have a chat to Levi Van Eck and mum Rosemarie.

WHERE: Nambour General Hospital – meet at main entrance

WHEN: Thursday, 10 March at 10am

ENDS

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