

Statement from the American Society of Nephrology (ASN) President Mark E. Rosenberg, MD, FASN, on Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Azar’s Remarks on Efforts to Improve Care for Kidney Patients

Washington, DC (March 4, 2019)-On behalf of the 40 million Americans living with kidney diseases and their families and the more than 20,000 ASN members who are physicians, scientists, nurses, and health professionals, ASN applauds the bold vision and leadership of HHS Secretary Alex M. Azar II in establishing an HHS-wide comprehensive kidney strategy and wholeheartedly agree that “we’ve waited long enough. We just need renewed ambition and the right policies.”

ASN believes that Secretary Azar’s tripartite strategy, focused on preventing kidney diseases by catalyzing innovation in health care delivery and therapeutics, expanding alternatives to in-center dialysis, and increasing the availability of organs for kidney transplantation, will significantly improve the lives of those Americans affected by kidney diseases. The Secretary understands the urgent need to bring higher quality care to patients. He experienced it firsthand when his father had kidney failure, underwent dialysis, and then fortunately received a kidney transplant. I commend the Secretary and this administration for acknowledging that the current state of care for kidney patients is unacceptable and that complex barriers inhibit innovation—and for developing a visionary strategy to change that reality.

More than 40 million people in the United States are living with kidney diseases, a condition for which there is no cure, and more than 700,000 Americans have kidney failure, a group whose ranks are increased by 100,000 Americans every year. In addition to the suffering of patients, families, and caregivers, kidney diseases are costly to the American public. Medicare alone spent more than \$114 billion managing kidney diseases in 2016, 23% of all Medicare spending.

Secretary Azar rightly highlights the need for “more efforts to prevent, detect, and slow the progression of kidney disease,” and ASN concurs that testing new ways of delivering care across the continuum of kidney diseases is a crucial step in the right direction. We have known for years that home dialysis is an underutilized therapy that can significantly improve patients’ lives and outcomes as compared to in-center hemodialysis. “We believe patients with kidney failure deserve more options for treatment, from both today’s technologies and those of the future” said Secretary Azar, and ASN applauds his commitment to our patients.

Transplantation is the best therapy for kidney failure for most patients, but we are unable to deliver every candidate this optimal option due to the limited number of organs. There are significant, untapped opportunities for improvement in increasing the

availability of organs. ASN agrees that we need to “look at how we can deliver more organs for transplants and develop wearable and implantable artificial kidneys to help Americans escape the burdens of dialysis altogether.”

I am grateful for Secretary’s Azar’s commitment to bringing new therapies to patients through KidneyX, a partnership between HHS and ASN to accelerate innovation in the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of kidney diseases. KidneyX stimulates the commercialization of new therapies and technologies, providing a catalyst for investment by the private market. By funding promising innovators through a series of prize competitions and de-risking the commercialization process by fostering coordination across HHS, KidneyX aims to create a sense of urgency within the private sector to improve the lives of Americans living with kidney diseases through product development. As Secretary Azar noted, KidneyX received 165 applications for its first prize competition, *Redesign Dialysis Phase 1*, showing “what a prize competition can drive in an otherwise neglected investment space.”

ASN welcomes Secretary Azar’s support of many of its long-held priorities in kidney research, care, and innovation, including the Kidney Precision Medicine Project, KidneyX, care models that go upstream to include individuals with kidney disease stages 4 and 5 and emphasize home dialysis and transplant, and taking bold steps to make sure we have enough kidneys to meet demand.

Americans living with kidney diseases deserve better, and the course Secretary Azar outlined today is an exciting first step towards achieving that goal. My fellow ASN members and I stand ready to aid the Secretary in realizing his ambitious and important vision to transform kidney care.

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Since 1966, ASN has been leading the fight to prevent, treat, and cure kidney diseases throughout the world by educating health professionals and scientists, advancing research and innovation, communicating new knowledge, and advocating for the highest quality care for patients. ASN has more than 20,000 members representing 131 countries. For more information, please visit www.asn-online.org or contact the society at 202-640-4660.