

Managing fistula bleeds

Haemo dialysis patients who rely on a fistula will be aware of the dangers of uncontrolled bleeding from their fistula and the urgency of managing this type of occurrence. Whilst rare there have been instances of fatalities where bleeding has not been controlled in time and the patient has died as a result.

Those who receive the Kidney Care UK Newsletter may have seen a feature in the November edition entitled 'Put a lid on it'. This describes an initiative by the British Renal Society (BRS) and the Vascular Access Society of Great Britain (VASBI) to ensure that fistula patients have the means immediately at hand to deal with an uncontrolled bleed. They have worked together to compile a set of recommendations for the prevention and management of these potentially catastrophic events and to find a practical solution. To ensure that patients always have an appropriate method of applying pressure to a bleed a 'bottle top key ring' has been developed and is available to kidney patients who manage their access through a fistula. This is a small disc, similar in size to a milk bottle top which can be used immediately to apply pressure to a bleed. It has been designed so that it can be attached to a keyring and so can be instantly available as bleeds can happen even when the patient is not dialysing. A number of these bottle top key rings have been distributed to patients within the LAKPA area but if you are using fistula access and do not have one then contact your renal unit who will advise you further.

Staff in the units have issued fistula and graft patients with a little card (credit card size) stating actions to take in the event of a fistula bleed. This was also a recommendation from BRS / VASBI. Any patient can obtain a replacement card from their dialysis unit.

It must be stressed that if an uncontrolled bleed from the fistula does occur, the first priority is to summon help by dialling 999. However, in occurrences such as these where blood loss will be rapid and potentially fatal, it is vital to work to stem the flow while waiting for help to arrive by applying pressure on the bleed. Do this by following the instructions for your bottle top key ring.