

A third dialysis clinic will open in Topeka later this year to accommodate a growing need for treatment of advanced kidney disease.

DaVita, which operates dialysis centers nationwide, will open a new clinic at 3711 S.W. Wanamaker. Karen Steinlage, group administrator for the DaVita facilities in Kansas, said the first patient can start treatment soon, after a last contract is signed. Subsequent patients will start after the state inspects and certifies the facility, she said.

At capacity, 24 people will be able to get their treatment in each of three shifts, Monday through Saturday. Since most patients need dialysis three times per week, they expect to treat about 144 people each week, Steinlage said.

DaVita runs Topeka Dialysis at St. Francis Health, and Fresenius Medical Care has a dialysis clinic at 3931 S.W. Gage Center and home treatment options. The new location will be more convenient for some patients, Steinlage said, and will provide more space for the growing number of people who need dialysis. She estimated the patient population has grown by 10 percent in the past decade.

“That facility (at St. Francis) is very full,” she said. “We need to grow somewhere.”

Diabetes and hypertension that weren't properly managed are two of the major causes of kidney failure, and both have increased in recent years as obesity rates have gone up. Keelyn Ericson, a nephrologist who works with the facility, said his practice increased from three to six kidney specialists in 10 years.

“In the entire nation, there are more dialysis units each year,” he said.

Dialysis is one of few options for people who have end-stage renal failure, meaning they lost at least 85 percent of their kidney function, according to the National Kidney Foundation. Transplants also are an option, but some people have health problems that prevent them from

undergoing the surgery, and there are more people waiting for an organ than available kidneys.

The process involves removing a small amount of a person's blood at a time through a surgically created opening in his or her arm, cleaning it using osmosis with other fluids in a series of small tubes and returning it to the body. Most patients have to sit for three or four hours, and all of their blood cycles out of their bodies about eight times, Steinlage said. The waste products are essentially the same as urine, which failing kidneys can't remove from the body, and can be disposed of through the regular sewage system, she said.

Each person is assigned his or her own machine. DaVita also can coordinate home dialysis or peritoneal dialysis, which involves a person putting the fluid into his or her abdomen and then draining it instead of using a machine, said Erin Hinrichsen, administrator of the new facility. The St. Francis location has evening hours, and they are looking into a night shift, she said.

DaVita also offers classes on managing kidney failure and preventing kidney disease, Hinrichsen said.

"So many people come to our classes and say, 'If I just knew to watch my blood sugar, I wouldn't be here,'" she said.

For more information about the new facility, call (785) 234-2277. To learn more about kidney health, visit Kidney.org or KidneySmart.org.

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