Diabetes Patients: Information Needs and Seeking Behaviors

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Background Information

- Diabetes is a disease in which the body either does not produce insulin, or does not produce enough of it.
- There are two main types:
  - Type 1 Diabetes affects 5% of the population and is the condition in which the body does not produce any insulin.
  - Type 2 Diabetes is the more common type in which the body produces some insulin, but not enough.
- When we eat, the body turns our food into sugars, or glucose, for energy. In turn, our pancreas releases insulin to help get that energy into our cells.
- However, when a person’s pancreas does not release enough insulin, this can lead to complications over time if not treated.
- Complications include: kidney disease, lower extremity amputation, and even death.

Statistics

- According to a report by the CDC, 29.1 million Americans had diabetes in 2014.
- That number accounted for 9.3% of the American population.
- 25.9% of those patients were over the age of 65.
- The ethnic group most likely to be diagnosed with diabetes was American Indians/Alaskan Natives.
- Nationally in 2012, there were 15.5 million men diagnosed with diabetes and 13.4 million women.
- Diabetes is the seventh-leading cause of death in America.

Information Needs

For many patients, their needs revolve around lifestyle issues such as diet, exercise, and complications.

In a 1996 study by Beeny, Bakry, and Dunn, diabetes patients listed their information needs as follows:

- Type 1 Diabetes: Diet Restrictions, Injections, and Complications
- Type 2 Diabetes: Diet Restrictions, Injections, and Complications

Another key need mentioned by diabetes patients is information that is customizable.

A 2009 study by Savage et al. showed that patients want information that is easy to understand and that will pertain to them. Specifically, young people felt that diabetes information was directed towards older patients and wanted to hear information that was targeted more to their age group.

Studies have shown that when doctors give patients information that pertain to their personal needs their quality of life improves.

Additionally, an often overlooked population of diabetes patients is adolescents. A study focused on children showed that they know quite a bit about their disease, but they want more information on long-term and short-term consequences as well as more in-depth information on disease management.

Information Seeking Behaviors

Diabetes patients have a wide variety of sources they turn to for information.

A 2006 study by Robertson et al. showed that patients prefer information to come from their physicians, followed closely by friends and family members.

- However, the same study also showed that patients want more access to physicians and diabetes educators.
- Additionally, patients saw physicians as being important at the time of diagnosis and later in life as well.

The other prime source that patients sought information from is the Internet. A 2011 study showed that 83% of patients with a chronic illness have used the internet to access information.

Information Resources

This is the leading authority for diabetes information and features a wide range of topics that includes health education, lifestyle tips, and resources for patients on insulin.

- www.diabetes.org

Needs Assessment

A needs assessment should focus on gathering information that will help health professionals, diabetes educators, and family members learn more about what the needs are of diabetes patients so as to better treat/care for them in the future.

The assessment should focus on questions that diabetes patients have about their diseases.

The assessment creator should also take into account time since diagnosis. Newly diagnosed patients will have different needs than patients living with the disease for quite some time.

It should also be well-rounded. A variety of questions should be asked that cover a wide range of topics and sources of information.

References


Fos, Research & Annealu Lea-Fox, 2011.


Savage, S., Fox, Susannah. (n.d.). Regional diabetes information resources. 

Resources for This Community

Due to the information needs of diabetes patients, resources should be provided that directly address lifestyle issues:

Diabetes at Work: www.diabetestoswork.org
This resource is helpful to educating diabetes patients on how they can effectively manage their diabetes while working.

Diabetes – What to Eat: www.diabetesliving.com
This website is maintained by healthcare professionals and features healthy eating tips, diet change suggestions, and recipes for effectively managing diabetes.

Diabetes Daily: www.diabetesdaily.com
This website is dedicated to helping diabetes patients build community with one another to build encouragement and support.

Diabetes Goal Tracker App
This mobile device app is a great resource for diabetes patients who want to set goals for exercising, eating healthier, and getting on-the-go information about their disease.

American Diabetes Association
www.diabetes.org
This is the leading authority for diabetes information and features a wide range of topics that includes health education, lifestyle tips, and resources for patients on insulin.