Diabetes UK is committed to giving people on the front line of diabetes a louder voice. Putting this plan into action, the charity asked people with Type 2 diabetes and healthcare professionals what questions they’d most like to see answered through research. And the results are now in. Research Communications Officer Faye Riley runs through the top 10 priorities and how they will help to shape the future of Type 2 diabetes research.
Informed decisions about diet. Research could help to understand which type of support is most effective and how it can be tailored to benefit different people with Type 2 diabetes.

Further research could help us find out if the beneficial effects of diet and exercise can be maintained for the long term. This will help judge when, or if, medication is needed. It will also allow healthcare professionals to be more confident when it comes to choosing the right treatment for the right patient.

Why does Type 2 diabetes get progressively worse over time, what is the most effective way to slow or prevent progression and how can this be best measured?

Researchers don’t yet know exactly why beta cells stop functioning properly in Type 2 diabetes. More research around this could change the way the condition is treated. Slowing progression could help prevent people from advancing to different medications and could mean fewer complications.

How can psychological or social support be best used to help people with, or at risk of, Type 2 diabetes, and how should this be delivered to account for individual needs?

A review of studies on social and psychological support found that it’s linked to positive outcomes in people with Type 2 diabetes. Yet, provisions for psychological and social support within routine Type 2 diabetes care are lacking. Research could help to understand which type of support is most effective and how it can be tailored to benefit different people with Type 2 diabetes.

How can people with Type 2 diabetes be supported to make lifestyle changes to help them manage their condition, how effective are they and what stops them from working?

Supporting people with Type 2 to make the changes they need to lose weight and do more physical activity has been found to result in fewer hospitalisations and less use of diabetes medications. We now need larger, controlled trials to compare different approaches and work out how best to support people with Type 2 diabetes to make and maintain the right changes. This could mean healthcare professionals will be better able to give the right support and advice to help patients manage their condition.

How do stress and anxiety influence the management of Type 2 diabetes and does a positive mental wellbeing have an effect?

Studies have shown that stress and anxiety is very common, with 36 per cent of people with Type 2 diabetes saying they experience negative emotions because of their condition. This can affect how they self-manage their diabetes and has consistently been linked to higher blood glucose levels.

Further research could help us find out if the beneficial effects of diet and exercise can be maintained for the long term. This will help judge when, or if, medication is needed. It will also allow healthcare professionals to be more confident when it comes to choosing the right treatment for the right patient.

What is the best way to encourage people with Type 2 diabetes, whoever they are and wherever they live, to self-manage their condition, and how should it be delivered?

Empowering people with diabetes to self-manage their condition is crucial, so they can live longer and healthier lives. But across the UK, only 7.5 per cent of people with Type 2 diabetes have attended an education course.

We know structured education works and we need to find ways to improve attendance. Research can allow us to identify barriers and work out what’s best for different people, so they can learn about and manage their condition in a way that’s best for them.

Can Type 2 diabetes be cured or reversed and what is the best way to achieve this?

We’re seeing mounting evidence that putting Type 2 diabetes into remission is possible.

The DIRECT trial, funded by Diabetes UK, is testing if a low-calorie diet, alongside weight management support, can bring about Type 2 diabetes remission for the long-term, when delivered through GP care. Diabetes UK Fellow, Victoria Salem, is taking a different approach. She’s investigating if combinations of gut hormones could be used to put Type 2 diabetes into remission in the future.
The PSP puts people living with, and at risk of, Type 2 diabetes in an authentic partnership with healthcare professionals and researchers to drive the earliest stages of research, namely identifying what topics are priorities for funding and support.

The research agenda
Identifying the top 10 research priorities for Type 2 diabetes is only the beginning. Now, Diabetes UK plans to use the priorities to make future research as relevant as possible to people living with the condition.

Diabetes UK spends around £6.5m a year on research. And, as the charity continues to invest, it will make sure to direct funding towards these key research areas. Alongside this, the charity will raise wider awareness of the priorities. It will work to ensure the top 10 are seen and considered by researchers, industry, government agencies and research funders in the UK.

The priorities will be promoted further by the recently established Clinical Studies Groups (CSGs) for diabetes. These groups actively bring together researchers in specialty areas, people with diabetes and healthcare professionals to create a roadmap for future research. The CSGs will use the priorities to inform their work. They aim to generate a portfolio of studies that should be undertaken and encourage collaboration to stimulate the highest quality research.

About the PSP
Diabetes UK partnered with the James Lind Alliance (JLA), a non-profit organisation funded by the NIHR, to carry out a Priority Setting Partnership (PSP). The JLA oversees the PSP process, which is unbiased and follows an established method to find research priorities for different health conditions.

Dr Sarah Finer, a researcher and diabetologist from East London, was on the Type 2 diabetes PSP steering group. She explains: “The PSP puts people living with, and at risk of, Type 2 diabetes in an authentic partnership with healthcare professionals and researchers to drive the earliest stages of research, namely identifying priorities for funding and support.”

In May 2016 Diabetes UK asked people what questions about Type 2 diabetes they’d like research to answer. Over 2,500 people, including many healthcare professionals, got in touch. A staggering 8,000 ideas were submitted – one the largest responses a survey of this kind has ever seen. A final workshop was held in July, where a group of people with Type 2 diabetes, carers and healthcare professionals worked together to agree on the 10 most important priorities.

Making your views count
“My experience working with patients with Type 2 diabetes has highlighted that more research is needed to help understand the condition, its complications and how to best support patients. I wanted to get involved as I thought that research judged as a priority by those on the front line could have great value.” Katie Gray, podiatrist

“I am optimistic the top 10 priorities will help to create a new sense of direction for research. This will equip healthcare professionals and patients with the knowledge to best manage Type 2 diabetes and improve outcomes.” Michael Osei Kissi, radiologist and Diabetes UK Clinical Champion

“Answering these research questions will help us to understand how to better engage and support people with Type 2 diabetes to continue to manage their condition long term, and reduce potentially devastating complications.” Clare Nelson, Diabetes Specialist Nurse

Type 1 diabetes
The Top 10 research priorities for Type 1 diabetes, published in 2011, have been made widely available to diabetes researchers and UK funders.

www.diabetes.org.uk/type-1-diabetes-priority-setting-partnership

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