

Seriousness and hope in Type 2 diabetes conversations

Research conducted by Diabetes UK revealed that only a minority of people living with Type 2 diabetes believe it's a serious condition. Diabetes professionals walk a delicate path, balancing the need to convey the gravity of the condition, without frightening or disengaging the person, says Clinical Psychologist **Dr Jen Bateman (nee Nash)**, as she encourages you to reflect on the key elements of your consultations

motivation is complex but, fundamentally, we tend to be motivated by fear or hope. In a time-limited consultation, we don't have time to assess which type of person we have in front of us! So, communicating a sense of both seriousness and hope can help. One example may be, "We know that diabetes IS a serious condition, that if left unmanaged, can lead to damaging consequences. However, there are lots of treatment options available so, if we work together, there's no reason why you can't live a long and healthy life with diabetes."

Traditionally, Type 2 diabetes has been labelled a progressive condition – language which, understandably, may leave the person feeling despondent. However, with outcome studies of low-calorie dietary interventions casting doubt over whether progression is inevitable, sharing these findings are naturally more likely to lead to a sense of hope. Put simply, the prospect of remission may change the tone of these conversations in the future.

Conversations & clinical outcomes

The diagnosis conversation sets the scene for the person's relationship with their diabetes. We may be inadvertently modelling how important (or not) diabetes is, by the words we use and the way we say them. We have a window of opportunity within the diagnosis conversation to shape

Top tips for healthcare professional communication

- **Empathy:** Foster an empathic response.
- **Serious:** Communicate that diabetes is serious...
- **Reassurance:**...while reassuring that diabetes CAN be managed successfully.
- **Hope:** Convey a sense of hope that they will learn to manage their condition with time.
- **Information:** Give information to take away and advise to use at their own pace.
- **Plan:** Develop a clear next step: the next appointment, referral to an education programme, signposting to Diabetes UK services etc.



DR JEN BATEMAN, Founder of www.EatingBlueprint.com, has been living with Type 1 diabetes since childhood.

self-management efforts and, therefore, clinical outcomes.

Polonsky et al¹ investigated the diagnosis of Type 2 diabetes and self-management efforts one to five years later. Clinical outcomes were significantly better among those who reported they had been reassured at diagnosis that diabetes is serious, can be managed successfully, had been instilled with a sense of hope and had developed a clearer action plan with their healthcare professional.

Diabetes seriousness survey

Diabetes UK conducted a survey which asked healthcare professionals to share their ideas about how they talk about the seriousness of the condition [see also page 11].

Here are some ideas shared by colleagues:

- "I always acknowledge the hard work they have to do and that it is not easy, but we are here to help support them at all times and realise the difficulties that life can present at different times of their lives."
- "Diabetes is a long-term condition, but complications are not inevitable. It is within your control to make the changes necessary, with our support."

Language matters

Another Diabetes UK survey shows that many people with diabetes do not appreciate the seriousness of their condition.. So we should perhaps consider revisiting this issue with the people we support – using the right language. For practical guidance, explore the Language Matters Position Statement, produced by key stakeholders including people living with diabetes [see also page 11]

Furthermore, almost one in five people living with Type 2 diabetes is living with Diabetes Distress (DD). Given that one of the four elements of DD is 'Health Professional Relationship Burden', by equipping ourselves with communication skills, including the right language, we are powerfully positioned to influence psychological and physical wellbeing through the words that we say and the way that we say them.

REFERENCE

- 1 Polonsky WH, Fisher L, Guzman S et al (2010). *The Diabetes Educator* 36 (5); 828–834