THE LAST WORD

ONE UPDATE READER HAS HER SAY

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Describe your role in 50 words
I'm a Health Psychologist. My job covers delivery of clinical research projects working with multidisciplinary teams in the NHS and industry. I also teach and train healthcare professionals, as well as providing research supervision.

How did you come to be interested in diabetes?
I was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes when I was 7 years old, 38 years ago. When I was studying for my degree in psychology and communication, we did a module on Health Psychology. I was hooked. At the same time, I went on one of Diabetes UK's young adult's weekends, because I wanted to learn more about my own diabetes. I was fascinated by how people and their support networks, if they're lucky enough to have them, cope with, manage and respond to living with diabetes. I wanted to understand more about the psychological impact of living long term with diabetes.

I went on to do an MSc in Health Psychology and after that started working in research full-time. I worked on one of the first randomised controlled trials of continuous glucose monitoring in adults with diabetes – does anyone remember the GlucoWatch? That's when my professional relationship with diabetes really began.

What is the best thing about your role?
On the teaching and supervision side, the best thing is seeing people grow, develop and their horizons broaden. On the research side, I love the process of working alongside people with diabetes and healthcare professionals to understand and solve (or try to!) healthcare challenges.

What have you achieved recently in diabetes care that you are excited about and keeps you motivated?
I'm working on one of the NHS test bed diabetes digital projects. We want to provide people with Type 2 diabetes access to online programmes to support them with lifestyle management and reducing diabetes distress. This project is extremely challenging, but offers huge potential in terms of being able to reach out and provide this care in a different way.

Tell us about any involvement you have with Diabetes UK
I have been part of the Professional Conference Organising Committee for the last three years. I'm responsible for organising the psychosocial part of the annual Diabetes UK Professional Conference. Psychology runs through every aspect of diabetes care and it has been great to be part of that planning and ensuring that theme does run throughout the conference, as much as possible.

I am also part of a group of healthcare professionals and people living with diabetes who are working with NHS England and Diabetes UK to develop and map out a clinical care pathway that gives parity of esteem to the mental health aspects of living with diabetes, as well as developing recommendations related to this focused on workforce requirements.

Compose a Tweet-style comment about the one thing that could improve diabetes care in the NHS.
Psychological and emotional health needs of people with diabetes are often missed. As a clinical community, we need to strive in whatever way we can, to ensure that this situation changes.

What's coming up next for you at work?
We're starting to recruit people to take part in our BEAT diabetes programme. Things are going to start getting a whole lot more busy than they already are. I'm also looking forward to getting stuck into the work with NHS England and Diabetes UK focused on integration of mental health within diabetes care.

What is the most exciting thing on the horizon for diabetes care?
Lots of things. We're seeing huge developments within the field of prevention and remission of Type 2 diabetes. For me personally, though, I'm very excited about the recognition of the role of mental health within the delivery of diabetes care and seeing how this will unfold over time. I am also very excited by the development of closed loop (artificial pancreas) technology. I feel that the #WeAreNotWaiting movement has reached quite a pivotal moment within their cause and it will be interesting to see how this work continues to progress.

And, finally, what do you do to relax outside of work?
I find it quite hard to switch off, but I've got better at this over the years. I hang out with my husband and our son, Donnie. I swim and I've just fallen in love with walking again – really long walks. Shaka and Tash, my two cats, are also very good at helping me to relax.

Any final thoughts to share with Update readers?
I would fully recommend starting that conversation about mental health, whatever you think may be uncovered.