

Will a UN resolution be a UK solution?



Maggie Watkinson

Because there is so much happening in the UK in relation to diabetes care at the moment, as well as changes to NHS systems themselves, it is perhaps not surprising that we are often somewhat insular and only tend to look inwards. However, the situation in the rest of the world bears looking at too, not only for what we can learn from it, but also because there may be implications for the UK.

For example, according to the International Diabetes Federation (IDF), the diabetes pandemic affects 200 million people worldwide and is predicted to affect 6.3% of the global 20–79-year-old population by 2025 (IDF, 2006). These vast figures are somewhat scary, to say the least! The IDF is predicting that, as a direct result, healthcare services, particularly in developing countries, could be overwhelmed by diabetes, some indigenous populations could be wiped out because of the prevalence of diabetes in their communities and economies could be undermined (Unite for Diabetes, 2006).

A UN resolution on diabetes

As a result the IDF is leading a campaign for a United Nations (UN) resolution on diabetes, with the aim of declaring it on World Diabetes Day in November 2007 (the campaign for the resolution is to be launched at the *American Diabetes Association 66th Annual Scientific Sessions* in Washington, USA, on 10 June 2006). The IDF believes this will focus the attention of the world on diabetes, in a similar way that HIV/AIDS has been focused on; it believes that diabetes is currently a disease that is in the shadows, with relatively few people or governments aware of the potentially devastating effects on individuals, populations and economies. It is hoped that the campaign will result in, for example, the prioritisation of diabetes in individual nations' healthcare strategies, more preventative strategies related to the development of diabetes and its complications, more care for special-needs groups such as children, and more research (visit <http://www.unitefordiabetes.org> for more information [accessed 26.05.2006]).

So, what effect might this resolution, if it should actually occur, have on the UK? After all, we already have the National Service Framework for diabetes and it might be argued that diabetes is, therefore, already on the political map as a result. Many of the things the IDF is advocating

are already in existence in the UK, such as the recognition of some special-needs groups (for example, children and pregnant women).

However, although the awareness of the seriousness of diabetes is increasing in the general public because of the increased reporting in the media (not all of which, unfortunately, is accurate!), there is still a huge amount of work to do in relation to the prevention of diabetes through lifestyle changes. A UN resolution and the planned diabetes awareness campaign to get the public's attention would attract even more media interest and reinforce the messages that diabetes is significant and, perhaps more importantly, can be prevented or at least managed effectively.

Although there is, undoubtedly, now more funding for diabetes care we are all aware there are also priorities, and many of the initiatives we would like to put into practice are not currently possible due to a lack of the requisite personnel and money. It is possible that a UN resolution would further focus our Government on the importance of speeding up the process of implementing the measures we know are needed.

Another difficulty we are also currently facing is the lack of healthcare staff with the necessary skills to deliver effective diabetes care to the numbers of people with diabetes we already have, let alone the numbers we will have in the future. For example, practice nurses are already dealing with increased numbers of people with diabetes and are being asked to do more, particularly in relation to education for self-management of blood glucose. Although education and training programmes are rolling out to help them with this, more needs to be done. A UN resolution could stimulate more interest in and awareness of diabetes in education and training organisations, resulting in better diabetes education provision for staff.

Even if the UN resolution does not happen, the campaign is bound to have an impact on all nurses working in diabetes care; it will start in June in the US and then roll out through the rest of the world. Watch this space! ■

International Diabetes Federation (IDF; 2006) *Diabetes Atlas*. IDF, Brussels. Available at <http://www.eatlas.idf.org/Prevalence> (accessed 26.05.2006)

Unite for Diabetes (2006) *The case for a UN resolution*. IDF, Brussels. <http://www.unitefordiabetes.org/campaign/resolution> (accessed 26.05.2006)

Maggie Watkinson is Diabetes Clinical Nurse Specialist at Taunton and Somerset Hospital, Taunton.