

How social media improved my diabetes control



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When I first discovered the combination of blogging and diabetes, I was feeling quite desperate. I had been living with type 1 diabetes for 9 years (diagnosed at the age of 16) and my HbA_{1c} had never been below 130 mmol/mol (14%). I knew very little about my condition and the treatments that I was using. Nor did I realise the impact that diabetes could have on my life if I continued on my path of neglect. The turning point for me was almost instant. At the touch of a button I was welcomed into the world of diabetes blogging and social media; an environment that would change my future with diabetes for the better.

Diabetes blogging is a powerful and ever-expanding resource that provides a blank canvas for people to express their thoughts and feelings. It also provides information and support to those who have, or are affected by, diabetes. Personally, my venture into blogging came about because I needed an identity. I needed to be seen as more than just a hospital number, more than a blood test and more than a dose of insulin. I needed help to identify with, and take control of, my diabetes. From there, my online presence grew in the form of various social media platforms called “Ninjabetic”.

The benefits of blogging

The biggest change has to be my self-management, which had been non-existent. I used to test my blood glucose about once every 2 months and injected one dose of fast-acting insulin twice a week. I was resistant in every sense of the word and, through a mixture of fear and lack of understanding, disassociated myself with my healthcare team. Through writing about my experiences, however, I started to reflect on the condition, and accept and manage my diabetes. This led to me talking to other people (via Twitter and Facebook) who truly understood what it felt like to live with diabetes. I read about their every-day experiences and saw that I wasn't alone. Through social media, I saw people sharing their stories,

discussing strategies they use to overcome problems and educating one another in a way that was relaxed, informal and showed personal understanding.

One of the greatest facets of blogging is that it shows the real side of diabetes. It allows an awareness of how people manage their condition on a daily basis and gives the insight to fully appreciate just how much of a struggle it can be. From my point of view, the feeling of not being alone is the greatest comfort, and by sharing blogs and using social media, that feeling can be provided day or night.

Connecting with healthcare professionals

Another key feature is the connection that I have with healthcare professionals (HCPs). Blogging provides an invaluable tool for engaging with them in the comfort of my own home, where I don't feel under pressure to perform. Knowing that online HCPs read my blogs helps to build trust and, in turn, allows a good foundation for diabetes care to be delivered to me. Online engagement does not come in the form of medical advice; however, it does provide the opportunity to discuss the latest treatments, research and developments in diabetes. In an ever-changing world, people like myself are eager to keep up to date with the latest news, and through the internet we are able to self-educate. It is important, however, that we take guidance from online HCPs, who can point us in the direction of trusted information.

Blogging, combined with treatment delivered by my HCPs, has turned my life around. My HbA_{1c} is now 64 mmol/mol (8%). I support other people with diabetes, raise awareness about diabetes and have helped to develop diabetes services across the UK. Blogging has given me an unique insight into diabetes care, and has prompted my decision to do a nursing degree, with plans to specialise in diabetes. Without the support, education and feeling of belonging that it gives, I don't think I would be where I am today; strong, empowered and determined to take on the world of diabetes. ■