

The importance of peer support in paediatric diabetes care



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Peer support comes in many forms in paediatric diabetes care, not only for the young people with diabetes, but also the professionals working in the field. Support may be found at school, at a Diabetes UK group or holiday, from a Facebook community, or through “play dates”. As professionals, we receive support from our teams, through peer review, through national and regional networks and through networking at conferences and study days. The National Paediatric Diabetes Audit, NICE guidance and the Best Practice Tariff all stem from networking and groups of peers working together.

Support in schools

You may remember a case of a school being taken to court after failing to allow a young man with diabetes on a water-sports holiday (Rozenberg, 2000). Since 1989, I have supported schools with individual healthcare plans for residential school trips, enabling children with diabetes to fully participate. With careful planning, there is no reason for trips not to occur, but care has always been so different in many areas of the country and some schools have not been willing for the young person with diabetes to join in with their peers.

Wilson and Beskine (2007) had reported that very few schools supported the children with diabetes, especially around blood testing, injections and extracurricular activities. Thankfully, things have moved on, with the Diabetes UK campaigns “Making the Grade” and “Hands up for Diabetes care” resulting in fantastic resources for schools and a change in legislation. The Children and Families Act (2014) means that schools have a duty to support children with medical conditions.

A group of professionals from the North West Diabetes Network recently won the “Excellence in Diabetes Nursing” category in the *Nursing Standard* awards. Through collaborative working an Individual Healthcare Plan for schools was developed. Its development and implementation is described by

Sandra Singleton in this supplement.

Peer support for families

Peer support for families takes many forms; it may be a local diabetes support group or just families getting together in the waiting room. The Families with Diabetes National Network form a national structure of peer support who help inform professionals about what care we should be delivering.

Social media is another important way that families network. While some nurses may worry about families using social media for support, I see it more like a supermarket where families can pick and choose what advice they wish to follow. There is no one more expert than the families. Our job is to make people self-sufficient and empowered to make informed choices about the information, rather than us feel threatened by it. Earlier this year, in the North West of England, a family’s 8-month-old child was diagnosed with diabetes. Through the generosity and support of the diabetes Facebook community, funds were raised to fly the baby’s Aunt from Australia to support the family at this difficult time. This demonstrates the strength of the community and we should acknowledge and embrace their expertise to support each other in a crisis.

My personal experience of attending The Youth Diabetes Project medical conference in Firth, Scotland provided peer support for me professionally that has influenced and shaped how I work. The Youth Diabetes Project (Farquhar, 1985) had the vision of a peer group of paediatric diabetes professionals that could be a resource for local clinics. It is, therefore, very encouraging to see that this philosophy still stands. Our second article describes a Youth Engagement Toolkit for health professionals. Through this work with young people in Scotland, a strong peer support network was established offering the young people the social and emotional support they wanted and it also increased youth engagement with healthcare professionals. ■

Children & Families Act (2014) Available at: <http://bit.ly/1cYhZAX> (accessed 28.05.15)

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Rozenberg J (2000) School faces court over trip ban on diabetes boy. *The Telegraph*. Telegraph Media Group Limited, London. Available at: <http://bit.ly/1RqkCeo> (accessed 28.05.15)

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