

Are we fighting a losing battle?



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During Diabetes Week in June, the *Daily Mail* revealed that the number of people with diabetes in Britain has soared by 62% in less than a decade and in the last year alone, the figures rose by 125 000 – an increase the same as the population of Norwich (Spencer, 2015).

Data extracted from the Quality and Outcomes Framework show a huge increase in the number of people with diabetes (more than 1.3 million extra people in 9 years) and it is suggested that this is intrinsically linked to the nation’s obesity problem. While the increase may also be due to better rates of diagnosis, it is thought that obesity is the main driver (Spencer, 2015).

As we know, people with type 2 diabetes can reduce their risk of serious complications by following healthy eating principles and increasing physical activity. However, encouraging people to follow this kind of advice is challenging and often has little effect, hence the predicted increase in overweight or obese people.

The National Obesity Forum is urging the Government to take urgent action, with a “sugar tax” that imposes a levy on companies that sell drinks with high levels of sugar. Unfortunately, however, just last month the Government refused to consider taxing companies who profit from sugary food.

Diabetes UK have called for better education to help people deal with diabetes once they have a diagnosis.

Diabetes UK survey

A new survey from Diabetes UK has revealed that 42% of people with type 2 diabetes do not feel confident in managing their condition (Diabetes UK, 2015). Data were collected prior to and after the “Living with Diabetes Day” and a total of 2722 people with type 2 diabetes from across the

UK were surveyed.

According to the results just 16% of people with diabetes in England and Wales are offered a diabetes education course when they are diagnosed with diabetes, despite NICE recommending it is offered to everyone and strong evidence that giving people the skills to manage their diabetes effectively can significantly improve their quality of life.

In Enfield, we have offered structured education sessions for people with type 2 diabetes since 2006. In all the years we have been providing these sessions we have struggled to raise our attendance rates much over 50%. We have tried providing sessions in other languages, such as Turkish and Somali, as well as English. We have offered sessions in the mornings, afternoons, evenings and also Saturday mornings. We have also tried engaging with the local community and religious leaders to improve attendance, and we have held education sessions close to the mosques after prayers in order to attract Muslim people with diabetes. Sadly, despite our best efforts we still fail to attract much more than 50% attendance.

While I completely agree that self-care management skills are crucial to ensure good health outcomes, the biggest challenge I face on a daily basis is trying to encourage local people with type 2 diabetes that they would benefit from attending the education sessions.

There is potential to save costs by ensuring that all people with diabetes get the education they need to prevent avoidable complications from developing. As healthcare professionals and commissioners we should ensure that education about living with diabetes is available. We cannot, however, make people with diabetes attend and I believe this is the biggest challenge of all. How do you ensure good attendance at your education sessions? ■

Diabetes UK (2015) 42% of people with Type 2 diabetes “not confident managing their condition”. Diabetes UK, London. Available at: <http://bit.ly/1GJPMpl> (accessed 30.06.15)
 Spencer B (2015) Number of diabetics up 62 per cent in a decade: Obesity blamed as 3.3 million now fall victim. *Daily Mail*. Available at: <http://dailym.ai/1GM3b1b> (accessed 30.06.15)