

Talking Type 1: Guided self-help to address unmet psychological need in people living with diabetes

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Despite consistent and long-standing evidence on the elevated prevalence of psychological issues in people living with diabetes, specialist diabetes psychology support remains too often missing within services. Given the current level of unmet need, investment in specialist diabetes psychology resources that can be mass-produced is crucial. Bibliotherapy is an established practice that allows large audiences of readers to access psychological information and low-level psychological intervention through books. The Talking Type 1 range is the world's first bibliotherapy range for people living with diabetes and has been in use for several years across NHS Wales. This article introduces readers to the books in the range and how diabetes staff can support readers to achieve the best possible outcomes.

Psychological wellbeing is an essential component of long-term condition self-management, and psychological support is increasingly recognised as an essential component of effective long-term condition healthcare (NHS England, 2016). However, despite long-standing evidence that people with diabetes (PWD) routinely experience increased levels of common psychological issues such as depression (Anderson et al, 2001; Nouwen et al, 2010; Rotella and Mannucci, 2013), and that psychological distress impacts negatively on all aspects of diabetes management (Ciechanowski et al, 2000), PWD continue to struggle to access psychological care (Diabetes UK, 2019). Support is even harder to come by when the person is experiencing psychological issues that are directly related to living with diabetes. Where specialist diabetes psychology services are not in place, many PWD have had the experience of being told that they will be unable to gain any form of support as their difficulties fall outside the remit of services,

or have had their experience of living with diabetes completely ignored within their therapy appointments.

Given the overwhelming lack of a specialist diabetes psychology workforce within the NHS, it is essential that steps are taken to develop specialist diabetes psychology resources and education that can be used in the absence of direct support from a diabetes psychologist. Bibliotherapy (also known as “book therapy”) represents one way of meeting some of the unmet need in diabetes psychology, and is already established throughout the UK via the Reading Well Books on Prescription Scheme (<https://reading-well.org.uk>). While initial phases of the scheme focussed on common mental health issues, like depression and anxiety, the scheme has now expanded to include titles centred on physical health issues, such as chronic pain, chronic fatigue, IBS and stroke. Titles focussed on diabetes are present in the scheme but, echoing the issues with services, the specific psychological issues related to diabetes are neglected.

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Article points

1. People with diabetes experience increased levels of common psychological issues, which impacts negatively on management of their condition.
2. With direct support from a diabetes psychologist often not being available, the development of specialist diabetes psychology resources and education is crucial.
3. The Talking Type 1 range of books uses a guided self-help model to provide a basic-level psychological intervention to improve outcomes in people with diabetes.

Key words

- Bibliotherapy
- Guided self-help
- Psychology resources
- Type 1 diabetes

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Talking Type 1 – the world’s first bibliotherapy range for people with diabetes

The Talking Type 1 book range was developed in NHS Wales in 2018 to meet some of the unmet psychological need for people living with diabetes (see *Box 1*). Each book has been written by a specialist diabetes psychologist, in conjunction with individuals who have lived experience of the issues covered, to help support PWD and families who are experiencing common mild–moderate psychological issues in relation to their condition. These books are particularly helpful in instances where a person is starting to struggle, but referral to diabetes psychology may not be required or may not be practical (e.g. due to lack of staff, long waiting lists or the PWD being unable to attend appointments). By giving people access to these resources at an early stage, it is possible to reduce or entirely resolve distress before significant psychological or physical harm occurs. This may have the added benefit of reducing the burden on overstretched services.

The books use a guided self-help model, meaning that each can provide a basic-level psychological intervention on its own, but the impact can be reinforced and boosted by support from a member of the person’s diabetes team. Any professional with a relationship with the PWD will be able to provide effective support alongside the book.

Examples of the care team support around the book could include:

- Talking through the book and with the PWD as it is given out.
- Staying in touch with the PWD to find out how they are getting on with the book.
- Setting the PWD “homework” tasks (e.g. reading through particular pages or completing particular exercises) between support sessions.
- Keeping a note of any goals or plans that the PWD makes as a result of reading the book and reviewing these.

- Organising a review session with the PWD after they have read the book, to reflect on what they have learned and to set ongoing goals.

Each book contains a link to an online survey that is used for continual evaluation and improvement of the range. Anyone who has used the resources is welcome to complete the survey, be they PWD, staff or family members. Analysis of responses collected to date in Wales indicates that PWD felt significantly more confident to deal with the issues detailed in each book and, consequently, that these problems have significantly less negative impact in day-to-day life. As a result, the books have now become a mainstream part of the national Welsh diabetes programme.

Conclusion

While it is essential for diabetes services to continue to strive for an adequately staffed diabetes psychology workforce, realistically, addressing this issue will take significant time and service demand is likely to continue to outstrip capacity for the foreseeable future. The Talking Type 1 range uses specialist expertise to develop resources for common psychological issues faced by PWD on a mass level, and can help to begin addressing unmet psychological need. ■

Anderson, RJ, Freedland KE, Clouse RE, Lustman PJ (2001) The prevalence of comorbid depression in adults with diabetes: A meta-analysis. *Diabetes Care* **24**: 1069–78

Ciechanowski PS, Katon WJ, Russo JE (2000) Depression and diabetes: impact of depressive symptoms on adherence, function, and costs. *Arch Intern Med* **160**: 3278–85

Diabetes UK (2019) *Too Often Missing: Making emotional and psychological care routine in diabetes care*. DUK, London. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2PQCqtx> (accessed 01.04.21)

NHS England (2016) *The Five Year Forward View for Mental Health*. Available at: <https://bit.ly/31DgPHu> (accessed 01.04.21)

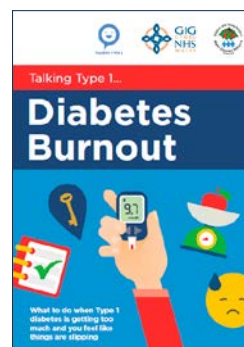
Nouwen A, Winkley K, Twisk J et al (2010) European Depression in Diabetes (EDID) Research Consortium. Type 2 diabetes mellitus as a risk factor for the onset of depression: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Diabetologia* **53**: 2480–6

Rotella F, Mannucci E (2013) Diabetes mellitus as a risk factor for depression. A meta-analysis of longitudinal studies. *Diabetes Res Clin Pract* **99**: 98–104

Box 1. The books in the Talking Type 1 range.

Diabetes Burnout

- Guided self-help resource for use in paediatric or adult diabetes teams, or primary care.
- Designed for people with type 1 diabetes aged 14+ years.
- For use when burnout has been identified (defined as a high level of diabetes distress that has resulted in a reduction in diabetes management behaviours).
- For use with mild–moderate difficulties. If difficulties are severe (e.g. extremely high HbA_{1c} or person is having DKA admissions), a referral to diabetes psychology or mental health services should be sought.

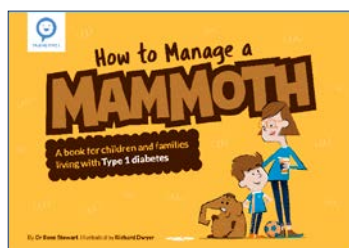
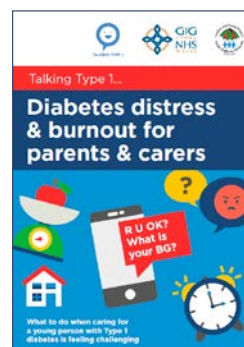


Not OK with Needles?

- Guided self-help resource for use in paediatric or adult diabetes teams, or primary care.
- Designed for people with insulin-dependent diabetes aged 14+ years.
- For use in situations where a person may be managing their insulin injections (albeit with some anxiety), but feels extremely anxious about other interactions with needles, such as annual blood tests or vaccinations.
- For use with mild–moderate difficulties. If difficulties are severe (e.g. a person is unable to inject their insulin), a referral to diabetes psychology or mental health services should be sought.

Diabetes Distress & Burnout for Parents & Carers

- Designed for parents and carers of children and young people with type 1 diabetes. Where children are aged under 10, this book can be used in conjunction with *How to Manage a Mammoth*.
- For use in situations where there is family conflict around diabetes and a parent has disclosed feelings of stress about this.
- For use with mild–moderate difficulties. If difficulties are severe (e.g. significant family distress), a referral to diabetes psychology or mental health services should be sought.



How to Manage a Mammoth

- Designed to be read by parents/carers to children under 10 years living with type 1 diabetes.
- For use in situations where there is family conflict around diabetes, or where children are experiencing issues related to diabetes distress or non-acceptance of diabetes.
- Activity section at back of book can be used to set “homework” or to structure conversations in support sessions.
- For use with mild difficulties. If there are any concerns related to the emotional wellbeing of a child, a referral to diabetes psychology or mental health services should be sought, and safeguarding procedures may need to be instigated.

This year will also see the launch in Wales of *Adjusting to Life with Diabetes*, which is designed to assist PWD adjust to recently diagnosed type 1 diabetes. Copies of the Talking Type 1 books are available in all secondary care diabetes units in Wales. Plans are in place to roll out the range across NHS England in summer/autumn 2021, and copies of the books will shortly be available for private purchase via Cambridge University Press. For more information and updates, follow @TalkingType1 on Twitter, or @TalkingType1Books on Facebook and Instagram.