

Supporting people with type 2 diabetes in Tower Hamlets

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The Diabetes Befriending Project was commissioned by NHS Tower Hamlets in September 2008. The author is part of Women's Health and Family Services (WHFS), an East-End community-based advocacy organisation with over 25 years' experience of working with local black and minority ethnic (BME) families to tackle health inequalities in the broadest sense, promoting education and awareness, and improving wellbeing.

WHFS health advocates have had a long engagement with BME communities' health in Tower Hamlets PCT and, among many issues, have witnessed a rapid increase in the rate of diabetes in the local community in recent years. This has drawn attention to a huge and unmet need for improved diabetes provision, including education, prevention work and access to a variety of healthy activities within the borough, as well as the promotion of self-care and better use of services in general.

As a result of working with people with diabetes in the borough, WHFS was able to identify gaps in patient care and came up with a new approach – the diabetes peer support scheme. Within this scheme a network was established for diabetes service users, carers and relatives from the Bengali and Somali communities in Tower Hamlets PCT, which was run by Bengali

and Somali volunteers who provide practical and moral support to people with type 2 diabetes, enabling them to empower themselves to manage their condition more confidently and effectively.

The diabetes peer support scheme

As there was an increasing unmet demand for such a support scheme, the author was recruited to coordinate the Diabetes Befriending Project in December 2008 from her previous work with volunteers at The Royal London Hospital. So far she has recruited 19 volunteers (befrienders) with experience of diabetes to befriend people diagnosed with the condition. The volunteers are mainly local Bengali and Somali individuals.

The volunteers provide informal advice on healthy eating choices and introduce people to the healthy-living activities within the borough, such as the gym, gardening groups, walking, swimming and cookery classes. They may also accompany people with diabetes to appointments and provide moral support for people undergoing insulin initiation. These activities are aimed at helping those who already have diabetes to better manage their condition and improve their quality of life.

The author places volunteers at various settings across Tower Hamlets PCT.

Questions from potential volunteers are discussed, and the requirements of the befriending role explained. Before placement the volunteers are interviewed and undergo an induction and training session. The author reports to the management committee on the progress of the volunteers. She liaises with GPs, the PCT and different community organisations in Tower Hamlets, and gives talks and presentations to help recruit more volunteers and people with diabetes. To recruit volunteers, adverts are placed in local papers as well as leaflets in GP surgeries, community centres and libraries.

The author organises the rota and arranges meetings with volunteers and people with diabetes, and provides guidelines for the volunteers to help and guide them to carry out the tasks effectively. The volunteers also provide feedback to help improve the service.

Future work

The author plans to set up a support group to develop the project further. The group will meet monthly and provide a forum for mutual support, exchange of experiences, ideas and advice on diagnosis, treatment and self-care. She also plans to implement a befriender booklet that will give an insight into the relationship between befrienders and people with diabetes. ■

The IMPROVE™ Control Campaign

The Global Task Force on Glycaemic Control is a group of physicians and specialists in the field of diabetes from around the world that is working in collaboration with Novo Nordisk with the ultimate aim of identifying and developing practical solutions to the global problem of poor glycaemic control in people with diabetes. Since early 2008, the *Journal of Diabetes Nursing* has featured articles and submissions under the banner of IMPROVE™ Control – a global public awareness campaign focused on the need for improved control, which forms part of the Task Force's work. Throughout 2009, the journal will continue to bring you articles on the barriers to good glycaemic control, and submissions from *you*, our readers, outlining the strategies you have used to help people with diabetes improve their control.

For example, perhaps you have implemented a new educational session in your area that has helped break down barriers to control, or maybe you have set up a new referral pathway that has helped improve HbA_{1c} levels. The *Journal of Diabetes Nursing* would like to help you share your practical solutions for improving control, no matter how big or small, with other nurses working in diabetes. We encourage you to take part in this global initiative by calling 020 7627 1510, or emailing james@sbcommunicationsgroup.com.

