

Exploring diabetes impact on teenagers and their families

A multidisciplinary approach to treating teenage diabetics is needed to improve quality of life for patients and their families.

Diabetes is a rapidly growing problem, with 382 million people affected worldwide. The disease affects 24% of Saudi Arabia’s predominantly youthful population; meaning many of the country’s diabetics are teenagers. KAIMRC researchers have conducted investigations into the impact of diabetes on adolescents and their families, from physical discomfort to the psychological and social impacts of living with a chronic condition.

“In Saudi Arabia we have been focusing a great deal on the medical management and control of type I diabetes among our youth,” says paediatrician Fadia AlBuhairan from King Saud bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences. “However, we have failed to address the psychosocial impact on patients and their families.”

AlBuhairan and her colleagues investigated the full impact of type I diabetes on teenagers and their caregivers. They gathered data from health-related quality-of-life questionnaires given to 315 patients aged 12 to 18 at three hospitals. The patients’ caregivers completed the same questionnaire, plus a second one related to family impacts of the disease.

“We had an excellent response rate,” says AlBuhairan. “This reflects our participants’ sincere interest in addressing the complexities of this lifelong condition.”

The team found that all scores were lower for Saudi Arabian families than equivalent studies in other countries. Caregivers tended to give lower scores on the quality-of-life questionnaire than the teenage patients. The lowest scores



Teenage diabetics and their families are in need of a multidisciplinary approach to improve their quality of life.

for both caregivers and teens were in the ‘worry’ category, with parents’ emotional well being affected by concern for their child’s future.

Female patients in later teenage years (ages 15 to 18) were also more likely to report a lower health-related quality of life. This may partly be due to the complexities of treating diabetes in young women, as hormonal fluctuations mean their bodies require more insulin than males. Sometimes there are also issues related to unhealthy weight control practices.

“Research generates the evidence

needed to impact practice,” says AlBuhairan. “Implementing a multidisciplinary care approach to diabetes and other chronic diseases is essential. We hope to study other adolescent patient populations to find out if key findings in this study, such as low ‘worry’ scores, also cut across other disease categories.”

AlBuhairan, F., Nasim, M., Al Otaibi, A., Shaheen, N. A., Al Jaser, S., & Al Alwan, I. Health related quality of life and family impact of type 1 diabetes among adolescents in Saudi Arabia. *Diabetes Research and Clinical Practice* 114, 173-179 (2016).