CARE CORNER

Living Well with Diabetes

Aslena Hussain, Diabetes Nurse Manager, Diabetic Society of Singapore, shares her thoughts on how patients can still enjoy quality of life in spite of diabetes.

Diabetes is a demanding disease. When I saw my late grandmother struggling to come to terms with the condition, it left a deep scar in my mind and I resolved to help and prevent diabetes from affecting others.

Naturally, the life of a person with diabetes is different. Not many of the patients I have met manage diabetes as actively or effectively as they should. However, almost all those with diabetes feel that diabetes has affected their lives adversely and they feel burdened by the effects of this condition.

"Diabetes is killing me!" or "That's the end of me!" are the most common laments and complaints I hear from patients.

This emotion and social burden may be triggered by the physical distress, hypoglycaemia and hyperglycaemia and the other complications of diabetes.

So what is this "quality of life"? As defined by World Health Organization (WHO), 'health' means not only the absence of disease and infirmity, but also the presence of physical, mental and social well-being.

Quality of life is very important for people with diabetes as it supports an individual's capacity to manage diabetes and maintain excellent well-being in the long term. When one's stress level is high, it can lead to the worsening of diabetes and glycaemic control, plus an increased risk of complications.



Diabetes care is not only about the routine checks, such as blood sugar level, cholesterol, diet, exercise and medication. As healthcare professionals, we often face patients who groan and moan about their condition. So how can we help them face the challenges? First and foremost, we must establish a sound relationship with our diabetes patient. This is of utmost importance because most patients fear rejection by the healthcare professionals.

Sometimes they believe that by pleasing the healthcare professional, they will improve their relationship, such as not telling the healthcare professional what is really causing them their problems, not showing their test results, or even recording inaccurate results.

This can hinder the healthcare professional's efforts in tailoring the right treatment for the diabetes management. Healthcare professionals should allow patients to vent their feelings and frustrations. Instead of putting the blame on them if they are not responding well to treatment, we can discuss the negative aspects of diabetes and encourage them to improve in their efforts. We need to be more flexible and involve their family members too in the management of diabetes.

The quality of life of an individual can be excellent if he is ready to face challenges to attain success. Likewise, diabetes management is no different from life management. Diabetes patients should manage their diabetes well with the help of a concerned healthcare professional whom they can trust and depend on.

In many parts of the world, insulin, the main life-saving medication that children with diabetes need to survive, is not available. As a consequence, many children die from complications of diabetes, particularly in low and middle-income countries.