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# TACKLING DIABETES

## EDUCATION AND PREVENTION

**Diabetes Education and Prevention - World Diabetes Day theme for 2009 - calls for those responsible for diabetes care to understand diabetes, take control and know how to prevent complications. Diabetes nurse educator Chionh Lay Keng reports on the Diabetic Society of Singapore's unwavering commitment to achieving these goals.**

The Diabetic Society of Singapore (DSS) was founded by Dr Frederick Tan Bock Yam more than 40 years ago for the very purpose of educating people about the serious impact of diabetes and its complications, and providing services to people with diabetes.

### DIABETES EDUCATION & CARE CENTRES

A non-profit organisation affiliated to the International Diabetes Federation and the National Council of Social Service, DSS runs three diabetes education and care centres (DECC), all of which are conveniently located in the heartlands such as Bedok, Boon Keng Road and Jurong. Each is staffed by trained diabetes nurse educators and assisted by specialists, dietitians and podiatrists. The centres run a battery of tests to keep people with diabetes in check:

- Diabetic retinal screening (eye)
- Diabetic foot screening (nerve sensitivity)
- Cholesterol checks (heart)
- Microalbuminuria test (kidney)
- HbA1c
- Blood sugar level

The centres also offer services such as counselling on diabetes care and management to teach people with diabetes and their caregivers all they need to know – food pyramids, blood glucose monitoring, travelling with diabetes, nutrition, etc.

### SEAMLESS HEALTHCARE

A recent and crucial development in our fight against diabetes involves our partnership with family physicians or general practitioners (GP) to promote a seamless healthcare system aimed at helping patients achieve better diabetes control and care.

This has helped patients such as Mr Tan to cut the need to travel long distances to hospitals as well as reduce the waiting time for a consult. A regular at Central Singapore DECC, Mr Tan said, "I have been coming to DSS for the past five years for my eye checks, HbA1c, lipid and other diabetes tests. There are no long queues and it's cosy at the centre. The staff are pleasant and will patiently explain my tests results. I will then show the results to my family doctor who will prescribe the medications. I enjoy the convenience."

### DIABETES NURSE EDUCATOR

DSS diabetes nurse educators do not simply perform routine checks and tests; they play a significant role in educating patients and giving the treatment and management of diabetes a personal touch.

Mrs Seah, another familiar face at South West DECC, remarked, "When my diabetes is well controlled, the



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diabetes nurse educators are always there to encourage me and give me advice to achieve better control.”

### LENDING SUPPORT

Helping patients overcome the fear and resistance to better management is challenging but rewarding work, reiterated Ms Chionh Lay Keng, diabetes nurse educator in charge of the Chinese support group at Central Singapore DECC. Services such as counselling on management and self-care management classes have empowered more people with more knowledge to control their diabetes even better. The support groups are also an integral part of DSS' mission to build a network for people with diabetes and even caregivers to support and encourage each other.

The support groups conducted by DSS comprise both Chinese and English speaking patients, including members and non-members. According to Ms Shirlee Esther, “When the folks get together, there is no stopping the chatter! They encounter many common challenges and find support and comfort whenever they meet. But each person with diabetes also has a different story to share as they lead different lifestyles, experience different family situations, and have different ways of coping with the disease. So, there is never a dull moment as every member will have something new to learn and share with the rest of the group.”

### OUT & ABOUT

The support groups also organise activities that are practical, hands-on and relevant. A recent outdoor trip to Sungei Buloh Nature Reserve was not just about appreciating nature but also a time to demonstrate that exercise burns excess blood glucose and helps to keep it in check. The Chinese support group ate their way through an interesting lesson on nutrition at Boon Keng Hawker Centre where they picked up tips on eating healthy when eating out.

### SAVING LIVES

Ms Angie Lee, a diabetes nurse educator at Sembawang Hong-Kah DECC, said, “We've seen too many cases of complications arising from poor diabetes management and diabetes nurse educators play a significant role in teaching people that, with proper management, they can take charge and prevent unnecessary complications.”

Yet, nothing beats the satisfaction of saving lives, and eyes. Ms Germaine Tay added, “We've also seen many patients who, over the years, have benefited from the services at DECCs. For example, our diabetic retinal screening has detected a number of eye abnormalities and has saved the precious sight of many.”

### EDUCATION ON WHEELS

The mobile clinic was launched on 18 May 2008 by Mr Khaw Boon Wan, Minister for Health. It has been providing diabetic services to many residents in the heartland of Singapore. For many patients who are frail and immobile,

having the mobile clinic right where they live is a welcome sight.

Mdm Lee said, “My legs are weak but thanks to the mobile clinic, I do not need to travel far, I not only get my diabetic tests done but also save on transport fees.”

Another patient by the name of Mdm Wee said, “I am so happy that even in such a small bus, I am able to receive counselling on management of diabetes. I have learnt how to manage my diet more carefully.”

### REACHING OUT

As part of our efforts to promote awareness of diabetes in Singapore, our diabetes nurse educators have been travelling to various institutions, homes, schools and community clubs to conduct outreach talks and health screening on diabetes prevention.

### HELPING HAND

DSS has also been providing assistance to the needy with diabetes to help them manage their condition so as to prevent complications. The financial assistance program, funded by Lee Foundation, is much appreciated by more than a hundred people who are suffering from diabetes and who alone cannot bear the heavy cost of treatment.

Mr Samad, a beneficiary of the scheme, confesses, “Without this program, I don't know how I would have been able to afford to pay for my diabetes supplies. I would not be able to check my glucose and inject myself. The nurses have helped me to improve my diabetes by providing me with the knowledge to help me control my blood sugar and have also encouraged me a lot.”



Note: Names have been changed

Make an appointment to consult our diabetes nurse educators now:

DSS HQ @ Bedok  
Blk 141 Bedok Reservoir Road  
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Tel: (65) 6842 3382

Hong Kah Diabetes Education & Care  
Centre  
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Tel : (65) 6564 9818, (65) 6564 9819  
Fax: (65) 6564 9861

Central Singapore Diabetes Education  
& Care Centre  
Blk 22 Boon Keng Road  
#01-15 Singapore 330022  
Tel : (65) 6398 0282  
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Opening Hours:  
Monday-Friday 8.30am - 5.15pm

Saturday 8.30am - 12.30pm

Sunday Closed