

Team up to prevent diabetes and its complications

By **Stuart T Haines, PharmD**

According to the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, diabetes mellitus is an epidemic and a major public health problem in America. Student pharmacists can play an important role in preventing and controlling diabetes, and the National Diabetes Education Program (NDEP) is an important resource that every student pharmacist should know about. NDEP is a government-sponsored initiative that involves health care professional societies, civic organizations, and patient advocacy groups in an effort to improve the treatment of and outcomes for patients with diabetes. The NDEP was developed to address the diabetes epidemic by:

- Increasing awareness of the seriousness of diabetes and of risk factors, as well as strategies for preventing diabetes and its complications, among at-risk groups.
- Improving understanding of diabetes and its control.
- Promoting better self-management behaviors among people with diabetes.

- Improving health care providers' understanding of diabetes and its control.
- Promoting an integrated approach to the care of patients with diabetes.
- Promoting health care policies that improve the quality of and access to diabetes care.
- Reducing disparities in health care for patients groups that are disproportionately affected by diabetes.

APhA is an important partner in NDEP and the only pharmacy organization represented on the NDEP steering committee. Through this partnership, APhA advocates getting pharmacists and students more involved in improving the lives of people with diabetes.

NDEP provides a variety of educational resources to assist patients and health care providers. NDEP also produces a number of media kits to help groups disseminate information about diabetes through newspapers, radio, and television. Materials have been developed to inform employers, insurers, school administrators, and policymakers about the diabetes epidemic and ways to address it. These materials are unbiased sources of information and are not copyrighted. Health care practitioners and civic organizations are encouraged to reproduce and disseminate them. NDEP materials can be downloaded from www.ndep.nih.gov or requested by calling 800-438-5383. New titles and campaigns are developed regularly.

Cases rapidly growing

More than 18 million people in the United States have diabetes, and another 41 million are at risk (i.e., abnormal glucose metabolism that frequently precedes the diagnosis of diabetes). These numbers are growing rapidly. More than 1 million new cases of diabetes are diagnosed every year, and there has been a dramatic increase in the incidence of type 2 diabetes among adolescents and young adults. Unfortunately, public awareness of the risks for and potential consequences of diabetes is very low.

The dramatic increase in the prevalence of diabetes is fueled by several factors. First, type 2 diabetes is closely linked to obesity. Over the past 20 years, the availability of cheap, supersized meals and individual's diminishing levels of physical activity have led to an obesity epidemic that mirrors the diabetes epidemic. Second, type 2 diabetes is a disorder of the elderly. More than 20% of those age 65 or older have diabetes. Third, type 2 diabetes disproportionately affects those segments of the U.S. population that are increasing most rapidly. According to CDC, Hispanics/Latinos, Asians, Blacks, and Native Americans are twice as likely as individuals of European ancestry to develop diabetes.

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Joining the team

Pharmacists and student pharmacists have valuable roles to play as members of the diabetes care team. At the center of the diabetes care team is the patient. Ultimately, the person with diabetes must provide the day-to-day management of his or her condition. Beyond that, the composition of each patient's care team will vary according to the patient's needs, available resources, the setting in which care is provided, and the professional skills of the team members.

The benefits of taking a multidisciplinary team approach to diabetes management are well established. In the acute care setting, team management has resulted in shorter hospital stays and lower readmission rates. In the outpatient setting, patients who receive coordinated care from an interdisciplinary team are less likely to develop the long-term complications associated with diabetes. Patients who achieve recommended glycemic goals have higher quality of life scores, are more likely to remain employed, and less likely to be absent from work or school, as shown in a study reported by Testa and Simonson in the November 4, 1998 *JAMA*.

Pharmacists well positioned

Pharmacists and student pharmacists are often the first providers patients encounter when seeking health care. This is particularly true in underserved rural and inner-city areas. Pharmacy practitioners are well positioned to recognize people at risk for diabetes and such patients should be strongly encouraged to seek testing, lose weight, and engage in regular physical activity. During advanced practice experiences, under the supervision of an experienced practitioner, student pharmacists can assist patients with diabetes by taking comprehensive medication histories, screening for drug–drug and drug–disease interactions, providing instruction regarding blood glucose monitoring and other self-care behaviors, and making recommendations about medications. Most patients with diabetes are on complex drug regimens that call for carefully timed medication administration with food intake. Student pharmacists can help devise individualized medication regimens that fit patients' lifestyles. By working collaboratively with physicians and other health care practitioners, student pharmacists can help patients meet their goals for glycemic, cholesterol, and blood pressure control.

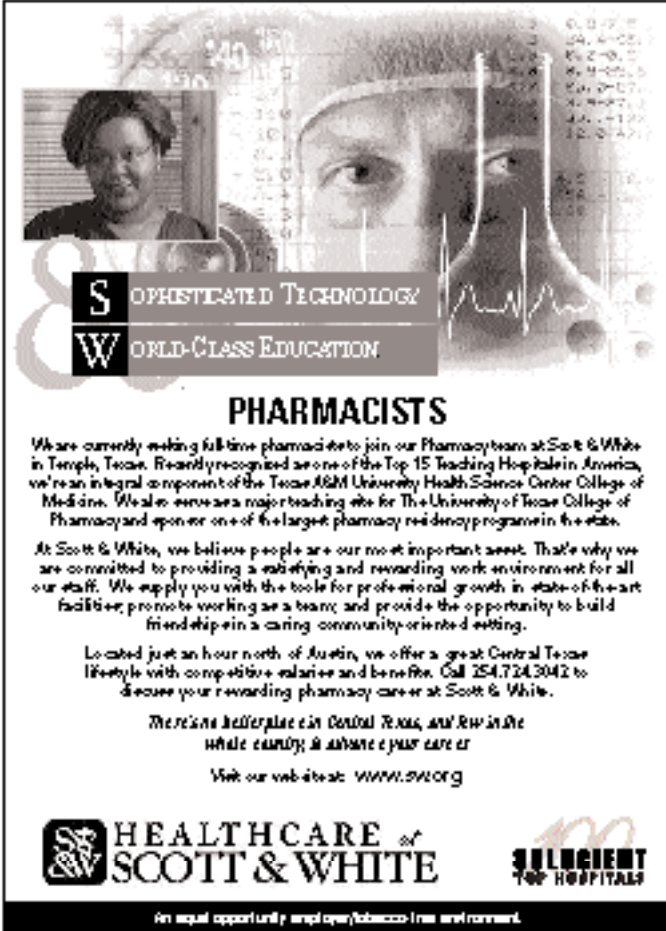
The results of the Asheville Project, during which pharmacists were reimbursed for meeting regularly with patients to assess treatments and progress toward goals, confirm that diabetes management programs based in community pharmacies can reduce health care costs, decrease absenteeism from work, and improve patient satisfaction. The evidence is clear: Pharmacists can make a tremendous impact on diabetes and its complications.

Large role for students

Student pharmacists should and can play an important role in delivering the messages about diabetes through service projects such as *Operation Diabetes*. By taking part in direct patient care activities in school and at work, student pharmacists can identify individuals at risk for diabetes and make significant contributions to the care of patients who already have diabetes. Drug therapy is an essential component of diabetes management and has become increasingly complex. Student pharmacists can partner with other health care professionals, employers, and organizations throughout the community (e.g., churches, civic organizations, and neighborhood associations) to sponsor diabetes awareness and screening activities. Everyone must do their part.

Let's team up to prevent diabetes and its complications!

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