

Making The Connection: Closing the Loop Between Professional & Patient Education

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Professional education for medical providers (including doctors, nurses, CDE's, physician assistants, pharmacists, etc.) has been around for ages and has not changed much over the years. In a nutshell, experts in the field of diabetes give formal lectures at medical meetings on the latest results of important clinical trials on a new drug or device. The overall purpose is to educate the care- Product Theater - Incretin givers who are in the trenches taking care of people with diabetes.

Medical professional education is important but, alarmingly, has not translated into a meaningful improvement in diabetes care. This is because the people living with diabetes (patients) have not been included in the educational process. There is a serious lack of two-way communication between providers and patients, and a misunderstanding by the majority of providers about what it is like to live with diabetes on a day-to-day basis.

One of the reasons I founded TCOYD was because I was frustrated with the traditional medical education model and wanted to focus on the people who are living with diabetes. Before TCOYD, I would give lecture after lecture at medical meetings and I would hear the same comment time and time again, "My patients are all non-compliant; they refuse to do what I ask them to do." Caregivers just could not understand why their patients didn't lose weight, prick their fingers 4 or more times a day, take multiple pills and/or insulin several times a day, eat perfectly healthy foods in neat little portions at the same time each day and exercise 30 minutes a day 5 days a week at the same times and intensity. Gosh... those SOB non-compliant patients! They obviously do not care about their own health! This is not an uncommon attitude and it seriously limits the success that a person with diabetes can achieve.

TCOYD has taken on the challenge of not only educating patients and professionals about cutting edge advancements in diabetes management, but has initiated a very unique program to close the delicate loop between the caregiver and the person living with diabetes. I say delicate because you cannot just throw people with diabetes in a room with doctors and lock the door. Our 'Making The Connection' program puts professionals and patients in the same learning environment in an effort to strengthen the "doctorpatient" relationship, dispel myths that patients have about the medical profession and leave the caregivers with a much greater understanding and appreciation for what it is like to live and deal with diabetes, emotionally and physically, on a daily basis. We feel quite strongly that by addressing this important missing piece of the clinical care puzzle, diabetes care will improve dramatically. Diabetes is a 24/7 chronic condition that must involve both active participation and self-management by the patient and also a knowledgeable and empathetic caregiver.

TCOYD is now in its 3rd year of educating professionals about taking care of people with diabetes, as well as gaining a much stronger understanding of the barriers, stresses and difficulties of living with a complicated and demanding chronic disease. The feedback from both patients and caregivers has been affirming; each expresses a much greater understanding for the other's roles and responsibilities, enabling a path of trust, communication, appreciation and better long-term diabetes care. It has been a tremendous learning experience for all and we are looking forward to the second half of 2008, as well as 2009 and beyond.

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