

Beating diabetes a family challenge

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Working with family and whanau can help keep people with diabetes well, a University researcher has found. Charlotte Paddison, who graduates with her PhD in psychology before leaving for a research post at Cambridge University, investigated type-two diabetes from a psychological perspective to better understand the mental processes involved in managing the disease.

“What we found was that diabetes is not just about individual self-management but that it’s very important to work with the family or whanau,” Dr Paddison says.

Much of what could be done to keep a person with diabetes well could be influenced by changing behaviours, Dr Paddison says, including modifying food intake to an appropriate diet or increasing the amount of exercise and activity the person takes. These behaviours are strongly influenced by family and whanau and could be supported by them.

“This study showed that having a supportive family is linked to better self-care behaviour and better physiological control of diabetes. Traditionally, clinical care has often focused very much on individuals but this study shows that family and whanau have an important role in helping people with diabetes make healthy choices. This should encourage clinicians to recognise the role family relationships play and to consider ways to promote positive family involvement in diabetes care.”

A further key finding was the impact of how people with diabetes

viewed their condition.

“The way people see their diabetes does shape how they take care of themselves, including their diet, exercise and taking medication in the way prescribed. Many people find it hard to make sense of their diabetes and this seems important in explaining why people struggle with self care and unable to achieve good metabolic control.”

Dr Paddison will continue her research into psychological and social factors in chronic diseases at Cambridge University School of Clinical Medicine, where she is taking up a post as research associate.

“I was interested in diabetes for two reasons. First of all it is a major international health issue – there will be 333 million people worldwide who will have diabetes by 2025. Diabetes also has serious health consequences including loss of limbs, loss of eyesight and kidney failure, but they are mostly preventable through good self-care - so there is a huge opportunity for health gain.”

Source: Massey University

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