

Research Review

Psychosocial Problems In Diabetes: How Common Are They?

Peyrot M, Rubin RR, Lauritzen T, Snoek FJ, Matthews DR, Skovlund SE (2005).

Psychosocial problems and barriers to improved diabetes management: results of the cross-national Diabetes Attitudes, Wishes and Needs (DAWN) study. *Diabetic Medicine*, 22: 1379-1385.

A study published in the October 2005 issue of *Diabetic Medicine*, examined the emotional concerns and self-management behaviors of 5104 adults with types 1 and type 2 diabetes from 13 countries around the world, including the United States, France, Germany, Japan, Australia and India. The beliefs and attitudes of 2705 physicians and 1122 nurses from those same counties were also investigated. This was the largest study of its kind ever undertaken.

While there was a great deal of variability from country to country, the researchers found that the majority of patients in almost all countries did not believe they were succeeding with their diabetes self-management. This was especially notable in the areas of diet and exercise, where less than 40% of patients believed they were “completely successful”. In general, health care providers were even more pessimistic, believing that their patients were less successful with diabetes self-management than the patients reported.

More than 40% of patients with diabetes worldwide reported poor psychological well-being. A majority reported a host of diabetes-related worries, including fears about the disease getting worse, feeling alone with diabetes, feeling concerned that diabetes will make it difficult for them to care for their families in the future, and feeling worried about hypoglycemia. Unfortunately, due to the way in which the data were collected and presented, it was not possible to tell which worries were the most common or most critical. Providers agreed that psychological concerns were common in their patients and that these problems contributed to poor diabetes self-management. Unfortunately, less than half of the providers felt able to identify and address the psychological needs of their patients.

IMPLICATIONS: While there are many methodological problems with this study, it is the first large, worldwide examination of these issues. The bottom line is that fears and worries about diabetes, poor psychological well-being, and barriers to effective diabetes self-management are common across all countries. None of this will be surprising to anyone who has lived with diabetes for even a short period of time. After all, diabetes can be tough. Previous research, conducted primarily in the United States, indicates that the most common worries include fears about complications, frustration that one’s best efforts don’t always lead to good blood glucose results, confusion about how exactly to handle diabetes most effectively, aggravation with one’s friends and family about diabetes, and more. All of this can lead to discouragement and despair, which can negatively affect the individual’s ability to manage his or her diabetes. The current study suggests that health care providers around the world recognize that addressing patients’ diabetes worries, depression (which is known to be more common in people with diabetes) and broader issues linked to poor psychological well-being can help patients to manage their own diabetes more successfully. Due to limited time or expertise, however, many providers don’t feel able to identify and address such problems.

GOOD NEWS: If you have ever felt discouraged, aggravated or scared about living with diabetes, we now know that you are far from alone! Worries like these are shared by the majority of people

with diabetes all over the world. Even better, proven strategies exist that can help people with diabetes-related distress to overcome these feelings and to re-gain a sense of confidence and control over diabetes. For more information about effective strategies, check out the BDI's new booklet, ***The Emotional Side of Diabetes: Ten Things You Need to Know***. You can view it on our website, www.behavioraldiabetes.org.