

Diabetes problem in United States continues to grow

Are you one of the 14 million people in the United States with diabetes? You could also be one of the 6 million who have the disease and don't know it, or one of the 54 million people who have pre-diabetes.

While these numbers seem shocking, they continue to rise in epidemic proportions. Although most people have heard of diabetes, many still do not understand what it is, how it is diagnosed and treated, or how to prevent it.

It is important to educate yourself about the risks for developing diabetes and the treatment of the disease if necessary. While many patients will go to their doctor with specific questions or to voice concerns, many others do not see their doctor often enough to get the information they need to make informed decisions. Few people think of pharmacists when they think of diabetes care, yet pharmacists are involved in nearly every step of screening and caring for diabetic patients. Being one of the most trusted and easily accessible health care professionals, pharmacists can identify patients at risk for diabetes and ensure that they get proper education and treatment. We are concerned about patients receiving the best care they can to prevent complications and decrease patient and healthcare costs.

With over 50 million Americans having pre-diabetes, it is important to understand the warning signs for early treatment and prevention. Things to look for include a family history of diabetes, lack of exercise, being overweight, diabetes during pregnancy, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, over 40 years of age, certain ethnic groups, and small increases in your blood glucose. If you or someone you know have any of these risk factors speak with your health care provider about the possibility of diabetes or even pre-diabetes.

For further information the American Diabetes Association provides an on-line risk assessment for the development of diabetes located at www.diabetes.org/risk-test.jsp.

If diabetes is not identified early and treated appropriately, it may lead to many health problems such as heart attacks, strokes, nerve damage, blindness, loss of kidney function, difficulty healing infections, and gum disease. Pharmacists can help prevent many of these problems by setting patient specific goals for the correct use of medications and monitoring devices, as well as lifestyle changes. Small improvements in weight, blood pressure and cholesterol control, exercise, smoking cessation, reducing alcohol intake and other lifestyle changes will reduce your chance of complications and promote a healthy, happy life.

With so many medications and insulins available for



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the treatment of diabetes, a pharmacist's expertise is invaluable. Patient care is more than just treating the disease. Pharmacists can identify possible drug interactions, explain proper use of your medications, warn about potential side effects, and discuss the best treatment options with you to minimize problems and resolve concerns. Your pharmacist should be made aware of all your medications, including herbals, nutritional supplements or over the counter medications (cough and cold), so he or she can properly monitor for any interactions and make sure you receive excellent care. Make time to speak with the pharmacist when you pick up your medications, especially if they are new for you or any changes have been made.

In addition to medication information, your pharmacist can provide education on other diabetes related items such as glucose meters (battery replacement, strips, control solution, use, errors, etc.), urine test strips, herbal products, and nutritional supplements. These items will help you control your blood glucose and prevent diabetes related problems when used correctly. Pharmacists can also aid you with supplies and treatment of other disease states related to diabetes such as home blood pressure monitors, cholesterol monitoring, immunizations, foot and skin care, and much more. The goal of the pharmacist is to empower the patient with the abilities of self-management and adherence to therapy that will improve health and well-being.

Because diabetes affects so many aspects of your health, it is important to have a "team" approach to your care. Your team starts with you, and can include many other health care providers including a physician, pharmacist, diabetes educator, eye doctor, dietitian, dentist, cardiologist, and more. With proper treatment, a great attitude, and a healthy lifestyle, diabetes and its complications can be prevented. For more information, contact any of your health care providers or visit the American Diabetes Association at www.diabetes.org.

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