

Bringing diabetes mellitus into focus on World Diabetes Day

Every year, World Diabetes Day is celebrated on November 14th, a significant date as it marks the birthday of Frederick Banting – the man who co-discovered insulin in 1922, with Charles Best.^[1] The theme for 2019 is “Family and Diabetes”, chosen “to raise awareness of the impact that diabetes has on the family and support network of those affected, as well as promoting the role of the family in the management, care, prevention and education of diabetes”.^[1]

Diabetes mellitus (DM) is a chronic non-communicable disease (NCD) characterized by high levels of blood glucose. It occurs when the pancreas does not produce enough insulin (type 1 diabetes), or when the body cannot effectively use the insulin it produces (type 2 diabetes). Its complications can lead to heart attack, stroke, blindness, kidney failure, lower limb amputation, and premature death.^[2]

According to the World Health Organization, 422 million people worldwide have diabetes, with most living in low-and middle-income countries.^[2] The prevalence of diabetes in South Sudan is unknown, but an estimate extrapolated from neighbouring countries puts it at 7.43%. A study conducted in Juba in 2017 at the newly started diabetes clinic found a prevalence 11.8%.^[3] Although this may not be representative of the whole country, it is still significant.

Diabetes can be delayed or prevented in people who are overweight (a key risk factor) and have impaired blood glucose metabolism. Diet and physical activity interventions and counselling are more effective than medication. For patients with type 2 diabetes well-trained staff are essential to provide supportive counselling on practical food choices and weight control, and monitoring for complications. The knowledge among caregivers on how to handle DM management is very poor in South Sudan.^[4] The article on page xx of this issue highlights this.

South Sudan needs a broader strategy to tackle DM within its fight against the other NCDs like hypertension. Training of health workers and general health awareness campaigns are essential to keep DM under the spotlight. We need the data more urgently now in order to create a robust policy. The opportunities given by this year’s focus on Diabetes and Family should be seized to raise awareness.

It takes a family to defeat diabetes.

References

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