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Fear of hypoglycaemia impacts emotional well-being and diabetes management

A new resource from the National Diabetes Services Scheme (NDSS) details why people living with diabetes fear hypoglycaemia (low blood glucose levels) and how they cope with their risk of hypoglycaemia. The resource, which was developed by the Australian Centre for Behavioural Research in Diabetes (ACBRD), in collaboration with Diabetes Australia, is entitled: ***Diabetes and emotional health: A handbook for health professionals supporting adults with type 1 or type 2 diabetes***. The ACBRD is a partnership for better health between Diabetes Victoria and Deakin University.

Fear of hypoglycaemia affects one in seven people with type 1 or type 2 diabetes. It can also affect their family members, who sometimes need to assist in the event of severe hypoglycaemia.

Dr Christel Hendrieckx, a clinical psychologist with the ACBRD, said the ***Fear of Hypoglycaemia*** chapter in the handbook highlights the importance for health professionals, during every consultation, to ask people with diabetes about their actual experiences of hypoglycemia, including frequency & severity, management and their knowledge of and feelings about low blood glucose levels.

“People with diabetes want opportunities to talk about their experiences of hypoglycaemia and any related fears, but it has to be handled in a sensitive and non-judgemental way. Often people with diabetes may be reluctant to talk about their experiences of hypoglycaemia because of concerns about losing their driver’s licence or job, or the associated stigma causing feelings of embarrassment, shame or guilt.”

“Many health professionals feel that they do not have the appropriate training to offer support to people with diabetes who have a fear of hypoglycemia, so the chapter in this handbook is an important new resource for them. It will help health professionals feel more confident to have conversations about these fears during consultations and discuss effective strategies to manage and prevent hypoglycaemia.” Dr Hendrieckx added.

Professor Jane Speight, Foundation Director of the ACBRD, says that people with diabetes may also experience other types of diabetes-specific fears, including fear of diabetes-related complications and injections/needles. “These fears are common and are just as serious and deserving of attention as the physical complications of diabetes,” Professor Speight said. “Being worried about future diabetes-related complications is one of the top concerns for people with diabetes”.

MEDIA RELEASE



Electronic copies of the *Diabetes and Emotional Health* handbook and toolkit for health professionals are free and can be accessed here:

www.ndss.com.au/online-resources-for-health-professionals.

The Hypoglycaemia Fear Survey-version II Worry Scale (HFS-IIW) is an 18-item questionnaire for adults with type 1 diabetes, or those with type 2 diabetes using insulin. It is the most widely used questionnaire to assess fear of hypoglycaemia.

A free factsheet about fear of hypoglycaemia for people with diabetes has also been developed and can be accessed here: www.ndss.com.au/fear-of-hypoglycaemia.

The National Diabetes Services Scheme is an initiative of the Australian Government administered with the assistance of Diabetes Australia.

Notes to editors:

- The handbook gives health professionals the strategies and tools to better recognise emotional problems and to work with people with diabetes to reduce the significant psychological burden that can be caused by diabetes.
- This handbook and factsheet were developed as part of the NDSS Mental Health and Diabetes National Development Programme. They were developed in collaboration with the ACBRD.
- The handbook has undergone evaluation, which involved interviews with health professionals (e.g. diabetes educators, GPs, nurses, dietitians, endocrinologists) and people with diabetes, who read and commented on advanced copies of the handbook.
- Mental health care for people with diabetes is recognised as a priority area in the Australian National Diabetes Strategy 2016–2020 - see the report here: <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/nds-2016-2020>
- Diabetes is a progressive and complex condition, which can result in serious health complications.
- In Australia, around 1.7 million people are living with diabetes and a further 280 develop diabetes every day.

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