

# Partners in diabetes care

A key part of successful diabetes management is supporting patients to become partners in care. This involves empowering patients to become active participants in their care and helping them to become knowledgeable about their condition and medication so they can make well-informed decisions to improve their health.

It is an approach that Amy Savage, former Clinical Nurse Manager for Diabetes Services at Northland District Health Board (DHB), advocates.

'A strength you've got to empower among patients is that they have a real ability to influence their own health. That is quite a powerful motivator if you can do that,' says Amy.

'Often we undertake consultations in a way that is not patient focused but is actually clinician or health care professional focused, and what you need to do is really change that thought at the start of the consult and say, "Why are you here? What can I help with?"

'Having that time for listening to people and allowing them to discuss what's on their mind is really important.

'We can't assume that everybody with diabetes will have the same issues,' explains Amy.

While health care professionals are clinical experts on diabetes, patients are experts on their own diabetes experience and management.

'When you use a holistic approach to managing and caring for people with long-term conditions, that whole understanding is about knowing a person's lifestyle, beliefs, fears and values, and how they are going to cope,' says Amy.

This is certainly true when it comes to safe insulin use. Many patients with diabetes require insulin medication to achieve good blood sugar levels.

'People often have that discussion around insulin quite late and in terms of a health literacy aspect it is really important to be discussing the next step with people,' says Amy.

'You've got to be able to discuss and alleviate any concerns or any problems that they have experienced to help them understand why maybe they need to start insulin.

'When you start on insulin it is quite a different concept and a larger step in terms of a person's self-management because they are having to make fairly critical decisions about insulin there and then, and it is often without any GP or anybody being around to advise them,' says Amy.

This means the 'right insulin, right dose, right way and right time' message is critical to discuss with patients to reduce the likelihood of insulin errors occurring. Determining what a patient knows about insulin, building their knowledge using simple, clear terms, and checking the patient understood the discussion is a good health literacy approach. The more a patient understands and is involved in their care, the more likely they will improve their health outcomes. ●

## PARTNERSHIP AND SAFETY TIPS

### Health professionals

- Involve the patient and their family/whānau in setting care plans based on a holistic assessment of the patient.
- Take time to listen, build relationships and check the patient understood what you discussed. The Health Quality & Safety Commission's *Three steps to health literacy* resource provides good pointers.
- Health care professionals must be competent to advise and start patients on insulin, and teach them the self-management aspects of diabetes and insulin use.
- Ensure you have the right administering device for the right insulin. Only use insulin syringes or a pen device issued by the manufacturer.

### Patients

- Don't be afraid to ask questions about diabetes self-management or insulin. The *Open for better care* campaign has resources to help you [plan ahead and ask questions](#).
- Discuss insulin early on with your health care professional. This will help to prepare you if you do need to take it.
- If you are in hospital and need help administering or storing insulin, ask staff for assistance.

Northland DHB produced a patient leaflet, [The Safe Use of Insulin](#), and a yellow ID card that is given to patients when they start taking insulin. The ID card records their name, NHI number, type of diabetes and name of their insulin. Patients can present it to health care staff, pharmacists and others as a safety prompt.

For more information about medication safety visit [www.open.hqsc.govt.nz](http://www.open.hqsc.govt.nz).