

DIETARY MANAGEMENT OF DIABETES - KNOWLEDGE OF THE

HEALTH CARE TEAM

In the Caribbean, the prevalence rate of diabetes is estimated to be as high as 6% in the adult population. The major form of diabetes is the non-insulin dependent type, characterized by the obese person. The most important form of therapy is dietary management. Control of diabetes is poor and this is reflected by high morbidity and mortality rates, with complications due to diabetes being the second major cause of death in the Caribbean. Dietary advice is currently given almost exclusively by doctors and nurses, and not by dietitians.

The knowledge of the health care teams at the University Hospital of the West Indies (medical wards), and clinics in the Kingston/St. Andrew areas was assessed by means of a questionnaire. Aspects of diabetes covered were general knowledge of diabetes, general and specific information on dietary management and counselling. A scoring system was devised to judge knowledge of these areas.

Both hospital and community personnel were better informed on general aspects of diabetes and its dietary management than on dietary counselling or the specific details of diet therapy. Hospital and community personnel obtained scores of 52.2% and 58.9% respectively for general knowledge of diabetes; 46.0% and 55.3% for general aspects of dietary management; 37.8% and 41.7% for specific details of diet therapy; and 28.1% and 27.2% for dietary counselling. Only 15.0% of hospital personnel and 22.0% of community personnel obtained total scores greater than 50%.

Among the hospital personnel, highest total scores were obtained by the residents (19% with total score $\geq$ 50%). Among the community personnel, the nurse practitioners performed best (36% with total score $\geq$ 50%).

While some differences between hospital and community personnel, and among the different categories were noted, the results of this study indicate that, in general, the knowledge of the dietary management of diabetes is poor. The study emphasizes the need to re-examine the teaching of this topic to medical students and nurses.