?Blind Wokingham woman backs new Diabetes UK campaign

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A local blind woman is backing a new national campaign highlighting the importance of diabetes education.

Diabetes UK's new Taking Control campaign highlights the huge difference diabetes education courses can make. These courses can help people with Type 1 or Type 2 diabetes take better control of their condition, giving them the best possible chance of living long and healthy lives.

Sophie Collins (32) is a mum from Wokingham and was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes when she was six years old.

She said: “In my 25 years of living with diabetes, I have only been offered two formal education courses. One when I was first diagnosed, a residential weekend for my family and a second four years ago when I switched to an insulin pump. Both courses were fantastic, I remember them filling me with confidence and removing some of the stigma of injecting as I was surrounded by children both with and without diabetes.

“My more recent course taught me so many new things about food and how my glucose levels react to complex carbs. This was fantastic and with the pump helped me significantly reduce my HbA1c.

(HbA1c) is a measurement of glycated haemoglobin so clinicians are able to get an overall picture of average blood glucose levels over a period of weeks or months. For people with diabetes this is important as the higher the HbA1c, the greater the risk of developing diabetes-related complications such as kidney failure, blindness and having an amputation.”

She added: “I think education courses should be a routine part of diabetic care from the word go. Especially with the innovations in technology, it is hard to keep up with the new developments and clinical trials. I am sure there are thousands of diabetics managing their daily routines the same way as they did the day they were diagnosed.

“I think it is important to have a positive message with education. As a child I grew up with 'if you don't do this you will die' which does nothing to stimulate and encourage people. Education and is the only way to enrich the lives of people living with diabetes.”

Jill Steaton, Diabetes UK South East Regional Manager at Diabetes UK, said: “Those who have just been diagnosed with diabetes or who have been living with the condition for some time, can find it difficult to get their heads around how to successfully manage the condition. But by attending a diabetes education course, they can instead feel empowered to take control and manage their condition with confidence.

“There is strong evidence that when people with diabetes are equipped with the knowledge and skills to manage their condition effectively, they can improve their quality of life. They can also reduce their risk of developing avoidable complications, such as kidney disease, stroke and amputation. These are not only personally devastating, but also expensive to treat. Diabetes costs the NHS nearly £10 billion a year, 80 per cent of which is spent on managing avoidable complications. But by giving people the knowledge and skills to manage their diabetes effectively, we can reduce their long-term risk of complications and reduce the cost burden on the NHS.

“We have launched our Taking Control campaign to highlight the importance of good quality diabetes education. We want to encourage everyone in Berkshire who is living with diabetes to go and ask their healthcare professional for information about a diabetes education course. The campaign also calls on the NHS to make sure that everyone with diabetes has access to the education and support they need to manage their diabetes well. Everyone with diabetes should have access to education from the moment of diagnosis and then throughout their lives."

There are more than 5,700 of people living with Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes in Wokingham.

Join the conversation on Twitter by using the hashtag #TakingControl.

To find out more about going on an education course, speak to your GP or healthcare professional. To find out more about the Taking Control campaign and to take action to ensure everyone with diabetes has access to diabetes education, visit www.diabetes.org.uk/taking-control

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For further media information please contact Sylvia Lambe on 01372 731 365 or the Diabetes UK Media Relations Team on **020 7424 1165** or email pressteam@diabetes.org.uk

Company Contact:

Diabetes UK

T. 01372 731 365
E. sylvia.lambe@diabetes.org.uk
W. https://www.diabetes.org.uk

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