



Member's Corner

Diabetes and the Effects on Health and Work

Dr. Niti Pall

NHS Sandwell and West Birmingham CCG and Director and Chair of Pathfinder Healthcare Developments:

Dr. Pall introduced herself to Members by explaining that, as a practising General Practitioner (GP) in Smethwick together with personal circumstances, she developed a special interest in diabetes. Chairing a European Forum, Dr. Pall reported that there is a predicted huge rise in diabetes by 2025 to approximately 4 million sufferers.

When asked, a lot of Members present reported that they employ someone with diabetes. Diabetes is a long-term, chronic condition.

There are two types of diabetes and Dr. Pall said that neither Type 1 nor Type 2 hinder anyone from doing a job, although there may be some restrictions, for example:

Employment Restrictions Type 1:

HGV Drivers, Group 2 Licence Holders, Armed Forces, Emergency Services, Local Authority Taxi Drivers.

Diabetes – Type 1:

Is less common and more serious. In the case of the Type 1 diabetic, the pancreas cannot make enough insulin. This type normally starts in childhood and it lasts for life.

Diabetes – Type 2:

Is more common and linked with obesity. Waistline size is relevant and Dr. Pall confirmed that men's waistline is in fact measured around the level of the navel.

Should I Worry About Diabetes?

YES! It's serious and causes major problems including heart disease and stroke, which are between two and four times more common in diabetics. Diabetes is a leading cause of renal disease and most feet and leg amputations are due to diabetes. The number of foot problems is on the rise and this is an area where the employer and employee need to be vigilant. Protective footwear may be an example of an issue which needs very careful consideration and special precautions may be necessary. Further, a high percentage of diabetics have nerve damage which may go unnoticed for years. The damage may mean that the diabetic has no sensation in toes/feet and therefore may not 'sense'

hazards arising, for example, from high temperatures. The proximal muscles (muscles closest to the body's midline e.g. thigh muscles), are affected and mean that the diabetic becomes unable to rise to a standing position.

What Must the Employer be Aware Of?

- The **effects of medication** need to be carefully considered as part of a risk assessment process especially where machinery is in use or where there is a responsibility for the safety of others for example, in the care sector and schools.
- The employee may not inform the employer due to a fear of **discrimination**.
- Shift workers will have to consider their **diet** and the frequency of **meals**.

George Allcock asked about carrying an **insulin pen**. Insulin pens are common in the United Kingdom, and are generally characterised by a different shape and the fact that they use an insulin cartridge as opposed to a vial. Some insulin pens use replaceable cartridges, and others use non-replaceable cartridges and must be disposed of after being used. Dr.Pall said that the pen should be kept safe and close at hand in the workplace.

David Hughes asked how effective giving a **sweet/sugary drink** would be. Dr.Pall recommended that a bottle of Lucozade or Coke handy would be helpful and indeed anything sugary or sweet that can dissolve quickly in water. Even sugar dissolved in water can be useful.

Dr.Pall was given a round of thanks for her highly informative presentation.