Care for older people living with type 1 diabetes


Most people think of type 1 diabetes as a condition of young people. They remember that, before the 1920s and the discovery of insulin, it was a fatal condition, and that even today it reduces life expectancy. As a result, the idea that we now have the challenge of managing increasing numbers of older people living with type 1 diabetes, may come as a bit of a shock.

The article by Anne Kilvert and Charles Fox in this issue of Practical Diabetes is therefore a very helpful reminder that:

• People may develop type 1 diabetes at any age, including old age.
• Some people who were diagnosed with type 1 in their youth are now living into old age.

There is little evidence to guide recommendations for type 1 diabetes management in old age when issues of multi-morbidity, polypharmacy, frailty and dementia co-exist. Recommendations therefore have to be pragmatic, experienced based and sometimes extrapolated from type 2 diabetes.

The article on the challenges of type 1 diabetes in older people provides an excellent overview and is clearly written. It contains many wise suggestions about management. The recommendations made are straightforward and practical.

General practitioners often have the responsibility of looking after older people with type 1 diabetes when comorbidities and mobility issues mean that people can no longer travel to secondary care based diabetes or geriatric clinics. We need better co-ordination of individual care plans with integration of expertise from primary care, secondary diabetes care and geriatric care to face the challenges of caring for older people with both type 1 and type 2 diabetes who have problems with cognitive function, multi-morbidity, frailty and mobility issues which impair the ability to live independently. The challenge in these situations where we can do little to extend length of life is to try to preserve the quality of remaining life.

Lee Ann Lee, BSN, RN, CDE, Diabetes Education Program Director, Hamilton Healthcare System, 364 County Road 222, Hamilton, Texas 76531, USA; email: leeannlee74@gmail.com

Reference