

Support found for peer-mentoring diabetes management program

January 29 2015

Managing type 1 diabetes is a never-ending task that requires multiple blood glucose tests, carbohydrate calculations and insulin injections or infusions. This constant effort to control the disease is daunting at any age - and it's especially challenging for teens and young adults.

A study that will appear in the February edition of *The Diabetes Educator* reports that about a third of [teens](#) and young adults surveyed by researchers reported social barriers to [diabetes management](#), ranging from embarrassment about testing [blood glucose](#) in the presence of their peers to inflexible schedules. Most fell short of what is considered optimal management of the disease, and a majority of those surveyed expressed an interest in a peer [mentoring program](#) to improve [diabetes control](#).

"Because previous studies found peer mentoring reduced alcohol and drug abuse among teens and improved diabetes management among adults, we wanted to determine if teens and young adults with type 1 diabetes would be receptive to a peer mentoring program," said Yang Lu, PhD, a Los Angeles Biomedical Research Institute (LA BioMed) researcher and lead author of the study. "A majority of the adolescents and young adults in our study were interested in peer mentoring to improve diabetes management and glycemic control. These findings open the door for determining the best means for helping teens and young adults improve their diabetes management and long-term health."

An estimated 3 million people in the United States have type 1 diabetes.

It is an autoimmune disease that strikes adults and children alike, killing off the body's insulin-producing cells. Type 1 diabetes requires a lifelong dependence on [insulin injections](#) or infusions and carries the constant threat of devastating complications. Successful diabetes management can help avoid these complications.

To conduct their study, the researchers surveyed 54 adolescents aged 13 to 18 years and 46 young adults aged 19 to 25 years about their diabetes management and interest in a peer mentoring program. They found the majority of the teens (78%) and young adults (89%) failed to meet the age-specific HbA1c targets recommended by the American Diabetes Association. The HbA1c is a measurement taken periodically to assess overall diabetes management.

The researchers found 87% of [young adults](#) and 57% of the teens were interested in a peer mentoring program. Among the teens, those who had supportive friends who knew about their condition and lived in large households were more likely to be interested in mentoring.

"If they haven't found support among their friends and family members, the teens may not have a frame of reference for understanding how they could benefit from a mentor," said Dr. Lu. "But they may well benefit as much as teens who are interested in having a mentor. We may need innovative incentives to make mentoring attractive to adolescents who are not accustomed to talking with others about the challenges of [type 1 diabetes](#), or we may need to find other means to improve their disease management."

Provided by Los Angeles Biomedical Research Institute at Harbor

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