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Helping Your Patients Transition to Insulin

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Diabetes
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Over 85% of patients experience a significant amount of distress at the time they are diagnosed with diabetes, including feelings of shock, guilt, anger, anxiety, depression, and helplessness.¹

For many people with diabetes, the transition from oral medication to insulin may bring the same emotions up again.

These unpleasant feelings, along with misunderstandings about insulin treatment, can present barriers to proper treatment and adherence.² As a health care provider, you can ease the transition to insulin by addressing your patients' fears and misconceptions.

Here are some effective communication strategies.



Patient Fear: **Needing insulin means I've failed to control my diabetes**

How to Help: **Prepare your patients from the start**

Talk to your patients about the progressive nature of the disease and how therapy progresses as well. Explain that diet, exercise, and oral medications may work in the beginning of treatment, but eventually he or she will likely need to use insulin to achieve the target A1C.¹ You will make your patients' lives easier if you prepare them from the start for the reality that insulin will probably be in their future.²

Don't use insulin as a threat: Don't imply to patients that, if they take their pills, lose weight, and exercise more, they won't have to go on insulin. When your patients eventually do have to use insulin therapy, they will perceive that they are being prescribed it because they have failed in those other 3 areas.¹

Patient Fear: I may pass out from hypoglycemia

How to Help: Acknowledge this concern and educate them

Ask your patients what they know about taking insulin and what they have heard about insulin. They may tell you that they've heard people frequently pass out when taking insulin. You should reassure them that current insulins are much safer and more reliable than they were in the past. Although hypoglycemia is still a possibility, assure your patients that, if they do get a reaction from insulin treatment, they will be able to feel the symptoms coming on, and you will teach them how to stop it while it is still mild.²

Patient Fear: Insulin causes more health complications

How to Help: Acknowledge the concern and, again, educate them

Your patient may fear having a heart attack, nerve damage, kidney problems, or even going blind. This fear may exist because a friend or relative suffered these kinds of complications shortly after starting insulin. Explain that, in the past, insulin was used as a last resort, and patients often developed extensive complications from years of being exposed to high levels of blood glucose that were not well

managed. Tell your patient that numerous studies show that proper control of blood glucose when using insulin greatly slows the progression of diabetic nerve, eye, and kidney problems.² Frequently reassuring patients that insulin actually works to reduce the risk of and limit complications is important.

Patient Fear: Insulin will make me gain weight

How to Help: Explain why and how they can avoid this

Data from the United Kingdom Prospective Diabetes Study (UKPDS) showed an average weight gain of around 8.8 pounds following the start of insulin therapy. Other studies show smaller gains.²

Explain to patients that some weight gain can be expected when taking insulin because their bodies can now properly metabolize carbohydrates. Encourage them to follow the healthy diet and exercise regimens that you provide to keep weight gain to a minimum.²



Patient Fear: Injections are painful

How to Help: Reassure patients that the pain is minimal

Pain associated with injecting insulin can be a big issue for many patients. Reassure your patients that newer syringes have needles with much smaller gauges and shorter lengths² and that they are laser sharpened and silicone coated for easy entry into the skin,³ which helps reduce pain during injection. Many patients actually say that finger sticks to test insulin levels are more painful than the insulin injections themselves.²

You can also introduce the idea of insulin pens to your patients by talking about how they enhance



dosing accuracy and permit faster and easier dosing changes compared with a vial and syringe. Insulin pens have also been reported to be more convenient and discreet and to require less training.³

Compassion for your patients makes a difference

The best strategy overall for communicating effectively is to listen closely to your patients to understand their fears and concerns and then correct any misconceptions they may have.

Patient education about insulin, its potential benefits, and how to manage symptoms of hypoglycemia are important for decreasing your patients' anxiety and optimizing adherence.



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