



# Nurses play a crucial role in the care of people with diabetes

## COMMENT



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ACCORDING to the International Diabetes Federation (IDF), in 2017, approximately 463 million adults (20-79 years) were living with diabetes, and by 2045 this number is envisaged to rise to an estimated 700 million.

In South Africa, it has been recorded that 12.7% of adults last year had diabetes, a 137% increase on the 2017 statistics of 5.4%. Adults who are diagnosed with diabetes have a 3.5

times higher risk of being admitted to hospital than those without a history of diabetes.

The theme of World Diabetes Day 2020 is: The Nurse and Diabetes. The campaign aims to raise awareness regarding the crucial role that nurses play in supporting people living with diabetes, especially during the current pandemic. Diabetes is associated with an increased risk for Covid-19. As the number of people living with diabetes continues to increase globally, the role of nurses and other health-care professionals is becoming increasingly important.

Approximately 59% of the health-care system is comprised of nurses, and they are thus an essential component in the multi-disciplinary approach and care delivery for people living with diabetes, according to the WHO. Nurses play a key role in promotive, preventive, curative, rehabilitative and psycho-social diabetes care and manage-

ment. In performing a comprehensive health assessment, and conducting patient-family interviews, important data can be elicited on the causes, risk factors, medical, surgical, social, pharmacological and non-pharmacological or other therapeutics, which can assist in the care decisions of the disease.

Social habits, lifestyle changes or early warning signs and symptoms of the disease can be identified by nurses in applying this approach.

Diagnosis, planning and implementation of care can be spearheaded by nurses as part of the scientific process, and referrals can be made promptly, thus either preventing the disease or promoting the well-being of people with diabetes.

Other practices implemented by nurses in the care of persons living with diabetes include administering medication, screening for and managing complications, for instance wound care, eye care and providing health

education. Apart from a bio-medical approach, nurses have the ability and knowledge to care for a person with diabetes in terms of their psycho-social needs, and address the change in behavioural and educational needs. Nurses also have an important role in offering psychological support.

Nurses need resources, in the form of human capital, supplies and education to support the care and management of people living with diabetes effectively. Health-care establishments have to invest in education initiatives for nurses to translate and implement the available evidence in communicating care and management principles to patients, families and other health-care professionals.

Considering the transformation of nursing education platforms and curriculum renewal processes in South Africa currently, it is an ideal opportunity to review nursing education and incorporate innovative and mul-

ti-faceted educational approaches to increase diabetes awareness among all categories of nurses. Nursing updates, in the form of continuous professional development and short courses, might be necessary to up-skill nurses on diabetes education and management in ensuring updated, skilled and competent care delivery for the diabetes population.

As we celebrate World Diabetes Day this year, I believe that due to the unique skills and competencies nurses have, they can contribute greatly to the care of people affected with diabetes and can make a difference in their lives. Simultaneously, it is a reminder for health-care establishments to invest in nursing and empower nurses in diabetes care and management.

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