

Responding
to challenges



FIGHTING DIABETES
PRESERVING A LEGACY

Diabetes at School Primer

An SFBLF Tutorial #2018-09-10-WS

SFBLF © 2018

Charitable Reg. No. 80740 6145 RR0001

David Sadleir, Ph.D. P.Eng.

President, SFBLF

info@bantinglegacy.ca

The full report resulting from our 2018 Summer Intern Research Program, *In-School Support for Youth Living with Diabetes - Status and Recommendations - Canada* (including comparisons with Australia, United Kingdom, United States) can be found under the 'Research' tab at www.bantinglegacy.ca.

The mission of SFBLF is to Fight Diabetes and Preserve a Legacy

Our focus is on disease prevention and disease self-management through education, clinical innovation and sustained support with an emphasis on youth.

Minimizing the transition challenges faced by youth living with diabetes as they navigate from the paediatric to the adult healthcare system is a key priority.

The SFBLF Diabetes Management and Education Centre (DMEC) is located in Alliston, Ontario, Canada at the Banting Homestead Heritage Park, birthplace of Sir Frederick Banting, co-discoverer of insulin and Canada's first Nobel Laureate.

P.O. Box 137, Alliston, Ontario Canada L9R 1T9 www.bantinglegacy.ca

Diabetes at School

Learning Objectives

This tutorial provides an overview of the need for in school support for youth living with diabetes, a summary of the current status in Canada and the resulting challenges and opportunities for teachers and families

The content should not be used as medical advice. It is essential that you consult with qualified healthcare professionals to identify and assess the needs appropriate for your family.

On completion of this tutorial, you should understand:

1. The need for in-school support of youth living with diabetes
2. The status of such support available in Canada as at December 2017
3. The roles and responsibilities of the stakeholders involved in such support processes.

You will also find the following information:

Where to find helpful resources

References cited in this Tutorial

1. The need for in-school support of youth living with diabetes

Children and youth living with diabetes face many day-to-day challenges to effectively self-manage their condition.

Whether living with Type 1 or Type 2 diabetes, students at school need varying levels of support in order to be safe and to have a positive and full experience.

They require informed support from teachers, appropriate accommodation to facilitate the need to adhere to their individual care plan, and the respect and understanding of peers. One of our 2018 education award winners illustrated the need in her essay submission:

“The biggest struggle I had to face was the misunderstanding from teachers and classmates. I do not like to draw attention to myself. The only problem is, when you’re having a low in the middle of a lesson, it is hard to not become the centre of attention when you must check your blood sugar and eat some snacks. I would sometimes become a distraction which would upset teachers and led to a lot of questions being asked of me such as, “ewww why wont your finger stop bleeding?” and, “I hate blood can’t you go to the washroom and do that?” which made me beyond uncomfortable”.

- T1 diagnosed at age 13

Teachers and peer groups can help a student living with diabetes by understanding their challenges and helping them to successfully manage their condition through cooperation, collaboration and an inclusive response.

Parents of youth living with diabetes need to be well informed about school support available for their student. They need to be proactive in ensuring a care plan exists for their student and that this information is shared with, and understood by, school staff.

2. The status of in-school support available in Canada as at December 2017

Some school jurisdictions have formal policies and prescribed support expectations. Many do not.

Formal policies

The Canadian Paediatric Society (CPS) published the results of a survey of Canadian Provinces and Territories in November 2017 [1]. The results are mixed and much more needs to be done. The CPS report:

1. Identified six provinces that have policies or guidelines that specifically address Type 1 diabetes in a school setting; British Columbia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Ontario and Quebec.
2. Established and defined criteria against which to assess the quality of existing policies as Excellent, Good or Fair. A rating of ‘Poor’ was used where no guidelines or policies exist.

In general, the ratings ascribed were based on the degree of compliance with published recommendations from the Canadian Paediatric Society (CPS), the Canadian Paediatric Endocrine Group (CPEG) and the Canadian Diabetes Association (DC).

3. The CPS assessment produced the following outcome:

Excellent: None

Good: British Columbia, Quebec

Fair: Manitoba, Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland/Labrador.

Poor: Alberta, Saskatchewan, Prince Edward Island, Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut

Beyond this formal study, there are evolving initiatives, often parent or practitioner group led, that are advocating for improvement. Websites and social networks are the media of choice.

The “Diabetes at School” website of the CPS contains helpful information and education plans for teachers and parents.[2]

The full report resulting from our 2018 Summer Intern Research Program, *In-School Support for Youth Living with Diabetes - Status and Recommendations - Canada* (including comparisons with Australia, United Kingdom, United States) can be found under the ‘Research’ tab at www.bantinglegacy.ca.

Gaps and Challenges

It is important to note that indigenous communities face a greatly increased risk of diabetes. Some of the Provinces and Territories rated as ‘Poor’, i.e., having no formal in-school support policies for youth living with diabetes, have significant indigenous populations.

It is clear there is real need for improvement to establish standardized policies or guidelines as an essential first step. Making a difference also requires engagement of a wide array of stakeholders, significant cost, education programs and tools for all and the will and commitment to achieve the required outcomes.

Thus far, the prime focus of attention has been on youth living with Type 1 diabetes. Their complete dependence on multiple daily injections of insulin makes this a priority. However, the growing prevalence of Type 2 diabetes in ever younger children and youth adds to the demand for proper care and attention in the school setting.

For some youth with Type 2, the immediate risk of brief lapses in attention is lower. Research and experience clearly indicate, however, that oral medication alone is not effective for a significant proportion of Type 2 cases in youth. That cohort also requires use of insulin and in many ways, the in-school support need is similar to that for Type 1. Both Type 1 and Type 2 require the student to check blood glucose levels frequently. There is a need to include consideration of youth living with Type 2 in all ‘diabetes at school’ policies and support processes.

In a broader context, the rapid rise of Type 2 in youth is a relatively ‘new’ phenomenon. One result is the need for more research and guidelines across the full spectrum of surveillance, diagnosis, ‘self-management’ education, treatment and improved transition processes.

3. Relative Roles of the Stakeholders

Students living with diabetes carry an additional developmental burden. They need persistent help from a wide variety of stakeholders in order to enjoy a safe and full experience at school.

Provincial and Territorial ministries of health have a responsibility to provide broad policy guidance and set expectations for action by individual school boards.

School Boards have the responsibility to establish specific policies and expectations for action by their schools.

Principals and staff have the responsibility to implement, and participate in, effective training programs, to cooperate with parents in establishing practical ‘Plan of Care’ documents for affected students, to ensure the required documentation is reviewed, updated and protected and to provide the necessary administrative support.

Teachers and other school personnel need to invest the time to get trained and keep that training up-to-date, be supportive of the student’s daily, routine condition management needs and understand what to do in the event of an emergency involving a youth living with diabetes.

Teachers also need to foster an environment of accommodation and empathy and support from fellow students while being sensitive to the confidentiality and dignity of the student living with diabetes.

Parents need to inform the school of their child’s condition and work with the school to create and maintain a practical Plan of Care, to meet as required with school personnel to review that Plan and ensure that all medication and supplies, clearly labelled, are readily available for use at school.

Students have to take responsibility for their personal safety and well-being (consistent with their stage of development), participate in creation and maintenance of their Plan of Care, wear medical alert identification as appropriate and communicate promptly any concerns regarding challenges, such as symptoms and inappropriate peer pressure, arising as a result of their condition.

Helpful Resources

All of the resources cited here can be found at www.diabetesatschool.ca.

This selected list is provided as a convenience for families.

Individual Care Plan for Students with Diabetes

Some schools may have a mandated ‘template’ to be used for developing an individual Care Plan for a student living with diabetes. A ‘generic’ template, created by the CPS, specifically for Type 1 can be found at:

https://www.diabetesatschool.ca/uploads/docs/ICP_ENGLISH_BASIC_PDF_updated_2017-03-29.pdf

There is a supporting “Quick Reference Sheet” intended to reflect data from the Care Plan and to be copied and made available in each classroom and all other locations (e.g., gym, library) where the student spends part of the day.

https://www.diabetesatschool.ca/uploads/docs/quick_reference_sheet_FINAL.pdf

Resources for staff training, useful tools for students, and more information for parents can be found at:

<https://www.diabetesatschool.ca/tools/resources>

References cited in this Tutorial

1. *Are we doing enough? Management of Type 1 diabetes I school*, November, 2017
<https://www.cps.ca/en/status-report/management-of-type-1-diabetes-in-school>

2. CPS Diabetes at School website
www.diabetesatschool.ca