

Discussion About the Correlation Between Poverty and Diabetes-

July 27th 2000

The panel: Ginette, Ursula, Doris

The host: Ros

The note taker: Ari

Experience of those who participated: Doris-has been a sufferer for 2 years

Ursula has been a sufferer for 15 years

Ginette has been a sufferer for 6 years

The causes: The panel agreed that many factors contribute to someone becoming diabetic. They mentioned family history and high levels of stress as the primary reasons for them having developed diabetes. Other reasons, which were not mentioned, are lack of exercise, excess weight and a poor diet.

* Doris mentioned that she believes that a doctor's oversight caused her diabetes. She told how her doctor gave her pills which contained too much sugar and which led to her becoming diabetic.

-This raises the issue about the health care system and how it deals with underprivileged people.

Controlling Diabetes: Ginette mentioned that for her diabetes is easily controlled. She takes one shot of insulin twice a day and when she is feeling particularly unwell she blows into a brown paper bag.

Ursula finds it more difficult to live with diabetes than does Ginette. She placed particular emphasis on the difficulty of eating three meals a day when the recommended diabetes diet includes only limited amounts of foods that one is used to eating-namely, carbohydrates and fruits. Diabetes sufferers must limit fruit intake because it contains high amounts of naturally occurring sugars. Carbohydrates must be limited because one's body converts them into sugar.

Ursula mentioned that the major diet difficulties are the small portions of the limited foods which create either great amounts of leftovers-in the case of carbohydrates or in the case of fruits, leftovers that turn brown and cannot be kept for more than a few hours.

Another area in which Ursula was quite vocal was that of the health care system. She mentioned that when she goes to see the dietician, they have limited suggestions about what she should eat. This raises the issue that perhaps dieticians should be equipped with cookbooks, which could aid their patients.

Ursula mentioned that the problem with having such a restricted diet is that one soon becomes at a loss for what to eat as most people yearn for variety. Related to this issue is the fact that if one is a diabetes sufferer, one must have three complete meals per day in order to stay healthy. Furthermore, if one is poor, one cannot always afford to eat three healthy meals per day.

Exercise and Excess Weight: Ursula also contributed the point that her doctor has told her that she must lose at least 80 pounds. She mentioned that it is difficult to lose weight if one does not have the money for such things as a gym membership or a personal trainer. In addition, it is difficult to lose weight if one can only afford to eat foods which contain high amounts of sugar-such are the foods that are the least expensive and which are distributed at food banks. Namely, canned goods, pastas, canned juices etc.

Diabetes and One's Emotional State: All three members of the panel recognized that sometimes the level of their blood sugar rises for no reason that can be attributed to anything that they ingested. This raises the issue that one's

mental state affects diabetes. Ginette mentioned that although she has a family history of diabetes, the disease did not surface in her body until a particularly stressful time in her life. The correlation of this facet of diabetes with poverty is that those who live below the poverty line often have stressful situations in their lives which those who are more well off do not have to deal with. Unlike those who suffer from certain other illnesses, diabetes sufferers must pay close attention to their mental state as to not cause their blood sugar level to rise.

In addition, if one is poor, one has access to fewer relaxing activities which could reduce one's stress level. Doris mentioned that when she is feeling stressed she goes for a long walk. Ursula agreed that this method worked to relieve stress however for her it is difficult to take many walks as her feet swell after a walk and the swelling does not diminish for another 2-3 days.

The Relevance of Family History-Particular Cases:

- Ursula: Her sister was a diabetes sufferer.
- Ginette: Diabetes was quite prominent in her family. Ginette's father had the disease- his legs were amputated because of it. Another member of her family had diabetes and they also had to have their legs amputated.

Ginette fell into a 5-day coma because of her diabetes. She missed the entire Christmas holidays due to the disease.

Treatment: The entire panel agreed that taking insulin twice a day is inconvenient. They were all in agreement that it would be much easier to take pills instead of insulin. Ursula mentioned that the injections cause one to have bruises and sore spots. Another difficulty in being a diabetes sufferer who is poor is that the needles are expensive. The cost of treating diabetes just adds another purchase which one must pay for on a limited budget.

Conclusion: As a final thought the host and the panel agreed that testimonials of those who have diabetes are extremely important because although health professionals know how to treat the disease, they do not know what it is like to live with diabetes.