

A Huron Hospital team is part of an effort for world recognition for diabetes

By Meta McMillian

An International CONCERN

Attending a conference to discuss treatment strategies for diabetes, and draw more public attention to the prevalence of the disease, is never routine for members of this local contingent.

But nothing prepared the group for the grandeur, excitement and unprecedented series of events that surrounded the 19th World Diabetes Congress held in Cape Town, South Africa, last December. First, there was the sheer size of the congress, which was sponsored by the International Diabetes Federation (IDF). More than 12,000 delegates from more than 130 countries attended to hear some 300 presentations and share information.

Then, the support that these delegates and other diabetes care activists have craved came several days later when the United Nations passed a landmark resolution recognizing the disease as a serious global health threat. Diabetes is the first noninfectious disease given that recognition by the U.N. The resolution also supports the IDF World Diabetes Day, November 14.

"The U.N. is so powerful and influential," says Sue Cotey, R.N., coordinator of the comprehensive self-management diabetes program of the Lennon Diabetes Center at Huron Hospital. "For it to make diabetes a matter of international concern will have a tremendous impact

on different parts of the world. More attention will be given to the disease, to encourage discovering and using more effective treatments."

Cotey was among the delegates to the South Africa congress. To date, she has represented Huron Hospital at three international health conferences and smaller gatherings as well, which has helped the hospital's diabetes program become recognized as a leader in diabetes care. Leann Olansky, M.D., a Cleveland Clinic endocrinologist and medical director, Huron Hospital Lennon Diabetes Center, was another delegate.

"I really wanted to go to the South African conference," says Dr. Olansky, explaining that the event drew a more diverse delegation by being held on the African continent. "It was fascinating to

visit the different booths representing the different countries," Cotey says. "Everyone had information about how diabetes was managed in their country. There was a lot of sharing and networking."

U.N. Gives Historic Support

The level of sharing and networking among diabetes care providers could be revved up several notches now that the U.N. has taken a stand. Activity among governments, researchers and healthcare providers is expected to increase dramatically since last December's passage of the U.N. resolution on the disease. And starting this year, the IDF World Diabetes Day will be designated a United Nations Day.

The effort to get the resolution passed was led by the IDF "Unite for Diabetes" campaign. The campaign included a network of diabetes care experts, scientific societies and charitable and service groups dedicated to putting this chronic, debilitating disease on the world's agenda.

The U.N. resolution puts diabetes in the same league as other global, but infectious, health problems like HIV/AIDS, and implores nations around the world to develop policies for the prevention and treatment of the disease. The resolution promotes more education to the public on the inexpensive treatments and

When Diabetes Affects You

For information about Huron Hospital's diabetes education program, call the Lennon Diabetes Center at 216-761-4286.

Leann Olansky, M.D. (left), and Sue Cotey, R.N., CDE, at the Malcolm Brown Gallery in Shaker Heights, Ohio.



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Sue Cotey, R.N., CDE



Sue Cotey, R.N., points to the location of the diabetes conference in South Africa.

strategies available to control diabetes, or remain free of the disease.

Cotey believes the treatments could be viewed more favorably, especially among skeptical patients in developing countries, because of the U.N.'s stamp of approval. Treatments also could become more standardized, especially when the success of various treatment strategies are proven, she adds. Cotey also believes more countries are recognizing the benefits of patient self-management, in conjunction with any needed insulin or other medication, as an effective treatment strategy.

Diabetes is characterized by the body's failure to produce the insulin it needs (type 1) or efficiently use the insulin it produces (type 2) to convert food products into the energy needed for everyday activities. Insulin helps the body maintain a healthy blood-sugar (glucose) level. While the cause of the disease is not known, risk factors include genetics, a sedentary lifestyle, poor

diet and obesity. Failure to treat the disease could lead to loss of vision, organ failure or amputations.

A Global Problem

Diabetes is becoming a global epidemic. More than 240 million people worldwide are believed to have it, but millions more have yet to be diagnosed and millions of others are at risk. About 380 million globally are expected to have the disease in 18 years, according to IDF.

Despite the fact that many people face starvation in this and other countries, "worldwide more people are overweight," Dr. Olansky says. "Not having enough calories is not a problem for many people. The quality of food eaten is the problem. People tend to eat high-carbohydrate and high-fat foods, rather than the healthier fresh fruits and vegetables. Even people with limited resources can make healthy food choices."

Other challenges to fighting the disease exist, she says. As people in countries in Asia and Africa develop more modern lifestyles, natural forms of exercise like walking to work begin to fade, Dr. Olansky explains. Also, having someone work for you or run your errands is a symbol of status in some countries, Cotey adds, so some people deprive themselves of exercise.

Even locally, Cotey continues, some diabetes patients are concerned about side effects of some medications, so they don't take

them. And some are fearful that medications can contribute to other, perhaps more serious, problems. "Education is a big component," she says. "People need to know that they can control diabetes through proper diet and exercise, and medicines that are proven effective. A good lifestyle also could keep them from getting the disease."

Insulin and other medications typically are prescribed medical treatments for diabetes, but more health-care providers and activists, including IDF, are encouraging self-management for diabetes patients to help them keep the disease under control. Through self-management programs, diabetes patients are educated about the disease and taught to monitor their blood-sugar level. Patients learn to modify their diets, lose weight and maintain an exercise regimen to help maintain a healthy level.

Cotey says Huron Hospital can take pride in the strides it has made through its pioneering self-management program to treat diabetes patients. The percentage of people enrolling in the program continues to increase.

"The diabetes conference in South Africa was affirmation that we are doing the right thing here," Cotey says. "But it also helped me to be more open to new approaches to treatment that we can incorporate. The conference was a once-in-a-lifetime experience, and there are exciting things on the horizon." ■

**November 14 is
World Diabetes Day.
To learn more, go to
www.huronhospital.org,
and click "Diabetes,"
then "World Diabetes
Day 2007."**

