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New book on an old foe

Researchers compile best-practice guidelines for managing diabetes in care settings. By Trisha Dunning, Nicole Duggan and Sally Savage

Planning care for older people with diabetes is challenging because complex medicine regimens are usually necessary; most people have multiple diabetes complications and at least one other comorbidity, which makes care more difficult, compromises diabetes self-care and leads to functional deficits and frailty.

These factors increase the risk of adverse events and admission to hospital or residential aged-care facility. They reduce quality of life and independence. Meanwhile, the Australian population is ageing and diabetes prevalence increases with age, making the issue of caring for these patients more prominent.

The guidelines describe important issues that health professionals need to consider when planning care for and with individual older people with diabetes in RACFs, in the community or in hospital.

The publication was designed to help develop care plans to suit the individual's health status, self-care ability and social situation; it is also meant to encompass general and diabetes-specific care. The guide advocates regular proactive risk assessment, individualised metabolic targets and quality use of medicines — including comprehensive medicine reviews. It also calls for the use of non-medicine options when applicable and deprescribing whenever possible.

The National Health and Medical Research Council guideline development process was followed for the publication. Key stakeholders, including older people with diabetes, were consulted regularly. The final publication consists of 18 individual guidelines and five risk-assessment tools.

The material was evaluated in one large regional residential care facility in Victoria and four small rural ones. Results showed the guidelines helped aged-care staff:

- learn more about how to assess and plan care for older people with diabetes
- make decisions about individual older people's care needs
- discuss important information about older people's health and wellbeing with their GPs
- proactively identify risks such as falls, pain, medicine side effects, hypoglycaemia and hyperglycaemia, and gain information on how to plan care to reduce the risks.

The McKellar Guidelines will have an important role in the care of older people with diabetes in the future. They set the standard for evidence-based diabetes care and can be used to audit and improve existing practice.

For the guidelines, go to: edm.org.au/clearinghouse/cat_view/4-guidelines.html

Trisha Dunning, Nicole Duggan and Sally Savage are the authors of The McKellar Guidelines.