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Editorial

ARE EYE CARE PRACTITIONERS EQUIPPED TO MANAGE PEOPLE WITH DIABETES?

Diabetes is a pervasive and complex chronic illness, and according to the American Diabetes Association¹, it accounts for approximately 30% of hospital admissions. The challenge of managing diabetes has intensified as treatment options have expanded, necessitating a multifaceted approach to patient care. Among healthcare professionals, eye care practitioners (ECPs), particularly optometrists, play a crucial role in managing patients with diabetes. However, their ability to provide comprehensive care is heavily reliant on their knowledge and understanding of diabetes and its systemic impacts.

The ocular implications of diabetes are profound and sight-threatening, including diabetic retinopathy, cataracts, and glaucoma. Therefore, optometrists must be well-versed not only in detecting these conditions but also in understanding the broader aspects of diabetes management. Such knowledge enables ECPs to offer more effective patient education and advice, ultimately improving patient outcomes.²

In the UK, for instance, optometrists examine 17 million people yearly, many of whom will not have consulted a doctor and may have undiagnosed diabetes.³ The study interviewed 21 optometrists in a focus group format and reported that there is a clear advantage in identifying undiagnosed diabetes in people attending optometry practices who are not

accessing other healthcare providers. However, as the popular saying goes, "you cannot diagnose what you don't know." The situation in Nigeria may not be different from what is obtainable in the UK, if not worse. With limited access to healthcare and fewer routine medical checkups, many Nigerians with diabetes remain undiagnosed, highlighting a critical gap that optometrists can help bridge.

ECPs' knowledge level of diabetes significantly influences their ability to care for people with diabetes. A good understanding of the disease allows ECPs to identify early signs of complications and refer patients for timely intervention. Moreover, well-informed optometrists can better educate patients about the importance of glycemic control, regular eye examinations, and adherence to diabetes management plans.⁴

Incorporating diabetes education into the training and continuous professional development of ECPs is essential. In our hospital, we have initiated a diabetes champion initiative, and implementing this at various hospitals could serve as a model. This program improved practitioners' knowledge and skills, leading to better patient outcomes, including reduced hemoglobin A1c levels, improved quality of life, minimized risk of developing diabetes-related complications, and decreased readmission rates.⁵ A similar approach could be adopted for eye

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care practitioners, ensuring they are equipped to handle the complexities of diabetes care.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of diabetes management is amplified when healthcare professionals work within a multidisciplinary team. Optometrists should collaborate with dietitians, diabetes educators, and counsellors to provide comprehensive care. This collaborative approach ensures that patients receive holistic management, addressing not only their eye health but also their overall diabetes control.⁶ Referrals to dietitians can help patients with dietary management, diabetes educators can offer tailored diabetes education, and counsellors can provide support for the psychological aspects of living with diabetes.⁷

The impact of a multidisciplinary approach is well-documented. Literature indicates that such collaboration can improve patient safety, close gaps in care during transitions from inpatient to outpatient settings and enhance the overall quality of diabetes care.⁸ For optometrists, being part of a multidisciplinary team means they can offer more than just eye care; they become integral to the patient's broader diabetes management strategy.

To support this initiative, we have included a rapid anonymized test of knowledge tool for diabetes within this editorial (scan the QR code). This tool is designed to gauge your current understanding of diabetes management. If you are interested in implementing this tool in your clinic, please contact the author. We are eager to collaborate with you to roll out this tool and enhance diabetes care in your practice.

In summary, enhancing the diabetes knowledge of eye care practitioners is crucial for improving the care provided to patients with diabetes. Optometrists equipped with robust diabetes knowledge can better manage and educate their patients, leading to improved health outcomes. Additionally, fostering a multidisciplinary approach ensures comprehensive patient care, addressing all facets of diabetes management. By embracing these strategies, optometrists can significantly contribute to the overall effort to combat the growing burden of diabetes, particularly in rural and underserved areas. Implementing diabetes education programs for optometrists and promoting multidisciplinary collaboration are essential steps toward achieving this goal.

https://surveyswesternsydney.au1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_e9Ab3fLTJiEm6Zo

Dr Uchechukwu Levi Osuagwu (PhD, MSc, OD, FAAO)

Senior Lecturer and Academic Lead, Rural Health
School of Medicine, Bathurst Rural Clinical School
Western Sydney University
E: l.osuagwu@westernsydney.edu.au

ORCID ID: orcid.org/0000-0002-1727-6914



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