LANGUAGE MATTERS:
THE IMPACT OUR MESSAGES CAN HAVE ON PEOPLE WITH DIABETES

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“DIABETES IS SUPER EASY TO MANAGE – AS LONG AS YOU DON’T EAT ANYTHING”

• Kassie Gregorio Palmer

OBJECTIVES

• Identify words that can be harmful in diabetes and ways to replace them with helpful words

• Discuss the benefits of becoming aware of and changing diabetes-related messages

• List diabetes-related language resources available to diabetes professionals
HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT ABOUT THE IMPACT OF LANGUAGE BEFORE RIGHT NOW?

WORDS CANNOT BE SEPARATED FROM CONTEXT
- Words create meaning
- Words elicit feelings
- Words have an impact on self-esteem
- Words can lead to anger/frustration
- Words can lead to self-defeat
- Words can build someone up
- Words can empower

HOW THE LANGUAGE MOVEMENT GOT MOVING
- Writing Group
- Joint Paper
- American Association of Diabetes Educators
- American Diabetes Association
- Resources
- Language Movement
GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Diabetes is a complex and challenging disease involving many factors and variables.
- Stigma that has historically been attached to a diagnosis of diabetes can contribute to stress and feelings of shame and judgment.
- Every member of the health care team can serve people with diabetes more effectively through a respectful, inclusive, and person-centered approach.
- Person-first, strengths-based, empowering language can improve communication and enhance the motivation, health, and well-being of people with diabetes.

RECOMMENDATION #1

USE LANGUAGE THAT IS NEUTRAL, NONJUDGMENTAL, AND BASED ON FACTS, ACTIONS, OR PHYSIOLOGY/BIOLOGY

- Example:
  - Joe takes his medication about half the time.
- Instead of
  - Joe is nonadherent with his medication. Joe has poor medication adherence.

REPLACING COMPLIANT WITH ADHERENT
LIVING WITH DIABETES FEELS LIKE…

- A failure
- A bad person
- Not good enough
- Shame
- Judgment

Example:

There are several factors that play a role in developing type 2 diabetes. It’s not Cindy’s fault that she got it.

Instead of

Cindy wouldn’t have gotten type 2 diabetes if she had eaten better.
WHAT IS STIGMA?

- Negative mark
- Different
- Disapproval
- Stereotypes aren't always negative
- In diabetes, they often overlap

FROM THE RESEARCH

Patients are “noncompliant”
- “I have no patience for people who cause themselves to become ill, lose limbs, and disregard their medication/diet regimen. I’d become overwhelmingly frustrated working with this group of patients all day every day.”
- “From what I’ve seen thus far, many of those who have diabetes are noncompliant and don’t take care of themselves. That would be extremely frustrating for me.”

RECOMMENDATION #3

USE LANGUAGE THAT IS STRENGTHS BASED, RESPECTFUL, INCLUSIVE, EMPOWERING, AND IMPARTS HOPE

- Example:
  - Lucy is taking sulfonylureas and they are not bringing her blood glucose levels down enough.
  - Instead of
  - Lucy is poorly controlled. Lucy has uncontrolled diabetes.
CONTROL YOUR DIABETES!

- Out of control
- “I’ve always felt like I’m the only one who can ‘judge’ my own feelings of control.”
- “Sigh. Control. I think that’s just an illusion.”

WHY HASN’T THE LANGUAGE OF DIABETES CHANGED ACROSS THE BOARD?

- It’s too hard to change
- These words are too engrained in health care communication
- There’s nothing wrong with the language of diabetes the way it is
- It’s impossible to erase the stigma of diabetes
- It’s not the most important problem in diabetes
- We need more work on recognizing the emotional side of diabetes
- There isn’t time

RECOMMENDATION #4
USE LANGUAGE THAT FOSTERS COLLABORATION BETWEEN PATIENTS AND PROVIDERS

- Example:
  - More and more people are living long and healthy lives with diabetes. Let’s work together to make a plan that you can do in your daily life.
  - Instead of
  - You are going to end up blind or on dialysis.
PATIENT ENGAGEMENT

- Interest
- Value
- Participation/Involvement

FROM THE RESEARCH

- Partnership:
  - Changing language would lead to trust, partnership
  - Less emphasis on disease, more emphasis on the person
  - Hope
RECOMMENDATION #5
USE LANGUAGE THAT IS PERSON CENTERED

• Example:
  • Lonnie has diabetes. Lonnie has lived with diabetes for ten years.
  • Instead of
  • Lonnie is a diabetic. Lonnie has been a diabetic for ten years.

IT’S TIME TO GET RID OF

TOP TEN REASONS TO ELIMINATE ‘DIABETIC’ FROM OUR VOCABULARY
- It’s often used incorrectly
- Some people don’t relate
- It’s a label
- It’s what we have, not what we are
- The person is more important than the disease
- It’s not helpful
- There is stigma attached to the word
- It limits recognizing the emotional side of diabetes
- It’s not empowering
- The only way to get rid of the word, is to get rid of the word
BODY LANGUAGE MATTERS TOO!

- What does your tone imply?
- What message does your face send?
- What is your body telling someone?

RESOURCES

- AADE has developed the following resources:
  - Two-page handout (for patients, families, friends, students, colleagues, members of society)
  - Media guide (for anyone who writes about diabetes)
  - [www.diabeteseducator.org](http://www.diabeteseducator.org) (click on practice then educator tools)

LANGUAGE WILL CONTINUE TO EVOLVE

- "...whatever words we use to replace the "problem words" will grow to associate with the same issues."
- "Focus on the person, not the diagnosis. You'll treat both more effectively that way."
Change your mindset
Change your approach
Change your words/messages

QUESTIONS?

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REFERENCES