

Tackling Diabetes in Brent

Why are we looking at this area?

According to Diabetes UK, there are approximately 2.9 million people in the UK that have been diagnosed with diabetes and this is on the increase. It is estimated that by 2025 almost five million people in the UK will have diabetes. Majority of these cases will be Type 2 diabetes due to the ageing population and the number of overweight and obese people increasing.

Diabetes UK¹ explains that diabetes is a common life-long health condition and develops where the amount of glucose in your body is too high because your body cannot use it properly. This happens because your pancreas does not produce any insulin, or not enough to help glucose enter your body's cells – or the insulin that is produced does not work properly (known as insulin resistance). There are two main types of diabetes, **Type 1 diabetes** and **Type 2 diabetes**:

Type 1 diabetes develops when the insulin-producing cells in the body have been destroyed and the body is unable to produce any insulin.

Type 2 diabetes develops when the body can still make some insulin, but not enough, or when the insulin that is produced does not work properly (known as insulin resistance).

If diabetes is left untreated, it can lead to heart disease, stroke, blindness and kidney failure. The other alarming figure is that there are around 850,000 people in the UK who have diabetes but have not yet been diagnosed.

The Department of Health indicates that diabetes does not affect everyone in our society equally. Significant inequalities exist in the risk of developing diabetes, for example access to health services and the quality of those services, and in health outcomes, particularly with regard to Type 2 diabetes. The Brent borough strategy states that Brent is ranked amongst the top 15 per cent most deprived areas of the country and there are stark differences in the life expectancy across the borough. This is the result of the significant inequalities in health and well being experienced by residents in our most deprived wards compared to the most affluent parts of Brent. Across a range of health conditions such as heart disease, obesity, cancers, diabetes and respiratory conditions, communities on lower incomes are disproportionately affected. Improving outcomes for people with diabetes is one of the specific objectives in the "Improving prevention, management and outcomes for priority health conditions in Brent" work stream in the Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Brent and therefore provides an opportunity for review.

What are the main issues?

Diabetes is one of the leading diseases in Brent and the brief prepared by the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) clearly identifies that there is a need for increased investment in the prevention of Diabetes and clearer auditing of data from GP care in Brent. The quality of care needs improving and a more focussed and long term approach to community engagement is required.

Brent is a very diverse borough with 59 per cent of the population in Brent originating from black and ethnic minority backgrounds. Research shows that people of South Asian, African, African-Caribbean and Middle Eastern descent have a higher than average risk of Type 2 diabetes, as well as less affluent people. People of South Asian ethnicity have the highest prevalence of diabetes within the Brent community and teamed with the significant inequalities identified, diabetes in Brent has become one of the biggest costs and challenges facing the NHS.

Although Type 2 diabetes tends to affect the middle aged or older people, national statistics indicate that diabetes is now more frequently being diagnosed in younger overweight people and South Asians at a younger age. The other risk factors associated with the increased risk of developing diabetes are social exclusion, lifestyle, social deprivation and lack of physical activities or for those who have a family history of diabetes.

¹Diabetes UK, Jan 2009, www.Diabetes.org.uk, http://www.diabetes.org.uk/Guide-to-diabetes/Introduction-to-diabetes/What_is_diabetes/

What should the review cover?

The review provides an opportunity to look into the causes of diabetes and identify ways in which the local authority and Brent PCT can break down some of the barriers to improving patient education and encouraging self management. It is evident that more can be done to highlight the importance of taking every opportunity to draw attention to the risk of developing diabetes and its accompanying complications which arise from unhealthy life-styles, and emphasise the personal responsibility which falls upon individuals to reduce those risks. Promoting effective self management can help to reduce NHS costs which arise from the onset of associated health conditions such as cardiovascular disease and renal failure. This review needs to assess the current quality of service to people with diabetes in the borough, particularly diagnostic services and help identify actions which can reduce the onset of complications.

The JSNA has reported that although the total spending per patient in Brent is in line with the national average, Brent actually has the second lowest primary care prescribing spend on diabetes patients in the country. Further investigation is required to identify the reasons and facts behind this data. Lack of early detection and prevention has contributed to the number of diabetic patients in Brent. There is evidence to support that there is opportunity to increase the prescribing spend in primary care to improve patient outcomes.

The JSNA brief Brent mentions primary prevention and the on going work to develop a new care pathway for diabetes patients to make better use of healthcare resources. Below is a summary of what is currently being offered:

- Pilot intensive lifestyle intervention for people with impaired glucose tolerance.
- The NHS Health checks programme being rolled out across Brent for adults aged 40-74 years.
- Redesigning the diabetes care pathway which aims to maximise the quality of care available.
- DESMOND programme is a patient education programme encouraging self management.
- Weight loss programme - A very new and recent initiative where patients are being referred to Slimming World by their GP's to support weight loss and healthy eating plans

What could the review achieve?

Prevention and improved Patient care

Diabetes can be prevented and tackling the growing number of people diagnosed with the disease is vital. With the responsibility for Public Health coming back to Local authorities a strategy and forward plan needs to be in place to ensure that relevant data is captured and recorded.

A task group would be the ideal forum for the local authority and partners to discuss how diabetes in Brent can be controlled and how to introduce a full prevention programme. There is work currently being carried out behind the scenes within the NHS and the task group could assist in advocating this within the local community. There needs to be continued evaluation of the work being done to tackle this problem and checks should be carried out so that data is captured and recorded accurately so that it is of value.