The needs, concerns, and characteristics of young Australian adults with type 2 diabetes

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Background
- Population-based studies in Australia have identified increasing numbers of younger adults with type 2 diabetes (T2DM). However, older adults with have been the focus of research and clinical care efforts to date, meaning that:
  - many T2DM services are designed for and aimed at older adults (and may not meet the needs of the younger adults)
  - there is a limited evidence base from which to draw when developing clinical services and interventions targeting younger people with T2DM
- Research is needed to improve understanding of the needs of this growing population and to inform service development

Aims
- To examine the needs, concerns, and characteristics of younger Australian adults (aged 18–39 years) with T2DM

Method
- An online questionnaire was developed that addressed clinical, behavioural, and psychosocial topics
  - It included validated scales (e.g., PAID-5 to assess diabetes-related distress) and study-specific items (e.g., perceived barriers to self-care)
- A random sample of 1,417 National Diabetes Services Scheme registrants with T2DM, aged 18–39, residing in Victoria were posted or emailed an invitation to take part
- Survey was also advertised statewide
- 149 eligible respondents took part
  - mean age: 32.3 ± 4.8 yrs
  - mean diabetes duration: 2.9 ± 3.4 yrs
  - 62% were women
  - 61% used oral hypoglycaemic agents to manage their diabetes

Results
- Clinical characteristics
  - 82% were overweight or obese
  - mean BMI: 33.6 ± 16.57
  - 63% reported at least one other co-morbidity
- Diabetes-related distress
  - 69% reported severe diabetes-related distress
  - Mean diabetes-related distress scores:
    - did not differ between men and women (9.1 ± 4.9 versus 9.6 ± 4.9, ns)
    - did not differ between those using insulin and those not using insulin (4.2 ± 0.8 versus 5.0 ± 0.5, ns)
    - were not associated with age (r = 0.03, ns)
- Barriers to self-care
  - Respondents identified lack of motivation (1.8 ± 1.3), feeling ‘burned out’ (1.8 ± 1.3) and a lack of time (1.8 ± 1.3) as the top barriers to diabetes self-care (score range 0 – 4)
- Perceptions of and engagement in healthcare
  - 59% respondents did not participate in structured diabetes education
  - 68% believed that younger adults with T2DM have different healthcare needs and concerns than their older counterparts
  - 62% believed that T2DM information and services are aimed primarily at people much older than them
  - 37% believed that health professionals do not understand the needs of younger people with T2DM
- Participants were interested in taking part in services tailored specifically for younger adults with T2DM, particularly:
  - 55% endorsed an online forum
  - 49% were interested in a mentoring program
  - 44% wanted information events and 41% wanted social events

Conclusions
- Almost two-thirds of respondents had impaired physical health and reported severe diabetes-related distress, much higher levels than the general adult population with T2DM
- Many had not taken part in structured diabetes education, perhaps due to the common perception that available T2DM services and resources do not cater to the needs of younger adults
- The development of online services tailored specifically for younger adults with T2DM was endorsed and may be one way to cater effectively to their needs and potentially improve their overall wellbeing
- The development of research programs with younger adults with T2DM is an urgent priority in order to inform service delivery and optimise outcomes for this group

Key findings
- Very high rates of diabetes-related distress were reported by younger adults with T2DM
- Many respondents were overweight or obese, and also reported other health problems
- Younger adults with T2DM perceive that available services are not relevant to them, and that health professionals do not understand their needs
- Many respondents expressed an interest in taking part in T2DM programs and services tailored specifically for their age group

References
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