



NEWS

Audit paints “bleak picture” of diabetes care in England and Wales

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Around 1.5 million people with diabetes are not getting the care they need, in what health campaigners describe as a “bleak picture” of treatment.

Although a growing number of people with diabetes in England and Wales are being properly cared for, four in 10 are still not getting the care recommended by the UK National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, the latest national diabetes audit has found.¹

Patients are supposed to receive at least eight forms of care, including blood tests to measure cardiovascular risk, kidney function, and glucose control and urine tests for kidney disease. They should also be tested for raised blood pressure, checked for signs of foot ulcers, and have their BMI and smoking history monitored.

But new figures for 2017-18 show that just 43% of people with type 1 diabetes and 59% of those with type 2 diabetes received care in line with NICE's recommendations. As there are around 3.6 million people in England and Wales with a diabetes diagnosis, roughly 90% of whom have type 2, the audit results indicate that around 1.5 million are not getting the combination of care they should be.

The latest figures for people getting all the recommended forms of care are an increase from the previous year, when they stood at 34% for type 1 and 48% for type 2 diabetes, but remain significantly lower than in 2013-14, when 45% of type 1 and 68% of type 2 diabetes patients received all eight forms of care.

Although use of the individual forms of care has risen, large discrepancies remain. Urine tests for signs of kidney disease were carried out among just 52% of patients with type 1 diabetes and 66% of those with type 2 in 2017-18. In contrast, 91% of type 1 and 96% of type 2 patients had their blood pressure checked.

A new series of treatment targets, based on HbA_{1c} concentrations, blood pressure, and statin prescriptions, was introduced in 2017-18, but the targets were met by just 17% of type 1 patients and 40% of type 2 patients.

And although the numbers of people being offered education about their condition has risen, reaching 38% of type 1 patients and 75% of type 2 patients in 2016, from 34% and 69%, respectively, the previous year, few have taken up the offer. Just 4% of type 1 and 8% of type 2 patients attended education sessions in 2016.

Responding to the findings, Robin Hewings, head of policy at the charity Diabetes UK, said, “Too few people receive the right checks, are meeting treatment targets, or receiving education programmes to help manage their condition.”

Karen Addington, chief executive of the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, said, “While this report paints a bleak picture of diabetes care and treatment broadly, people with type 1 are being particularly let down.”

The audit report comes as new figures from NHS Digital show that the sums being spent on prescriptions for antidiabetes drugs have risen to record levels, with 53.4 million items prescribed in 2017-18 at a cost of more than £1bn.²

Helen Stokes-Lampard, chair of the Royal College of General Practitioners, said, “For many patients with diabetes, medication is essential to help them manage their condition and live a good quality of life.”

Concerns over access to NHS treatment were highlighted in a *BMJ* investigation on 8 November, which showed a postcode lottery in availability of “flash” glucose monitoring devices to patients with type 1 diabetes.³

- 1 NHS Digital. Audit report 1: care processes and treatment targets 2017-18. Nov 2018. <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/national-diabetes-audit/report-1-care-processes-and-treatment-targets-2017-18-short-report>.
- 2 NHS Digital. Prescribing for diabetes in England: 2007/08-2017/18. Nov 2018. <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/prescribing-for-diabetes/2007-08-2017-18>.
- 3 Iacobucci G. Patients with type 1 diabetes are missing out on flash glucose devices, finds *BMJ* investigation. *BMJ* 2018;363:k4675. 10.1136/bmj.k4675 30404909

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