DESSA Editorial: One step at a time

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“When we are sure that we are on the right road, there is no need to plan our journey too far ahead; no need to burden ourselves with doubts and fears as to the obstacles that may bar our progress. We cannot take more than one step at a time.”
- Orison Swett Marden.

For all those who were lucky enough to attend this year’s NOD conference, the above quotation should bring back good memories. Doing something one step at a time is a guaranteed way to sustain personal motivation and drive. As educators we are prone to burnout and demotivation. Working with a disease such as diabetes is highly demanding, and sometimes emotionally draining. We need to have regular “spa” days, in order to recharge and move forward again. NOD greatly inspired the attendees, who as part of the experience, were asked to participate in an online assessment called DISC. This assessment is used to measure levels of dominance, influence, conscientiousness and steadiness.

DISC’s objectives were to help attendees to better understand their motivations, work habits and personality types, as well as to facilitate their learning more about their strengths and weaknesses. It is really helpful to be able to understand yourself, your colleagues and your patients when communicating with them, as dissimilar personalities react differently in the same situations. For example, talking in a rambling fashion to a person with a “dominance” personality is likely to frustrate him/her, and negatively impact on the degree of knowledge or information that is imparted. The same would apply when providing a brief synopsis of the facts to an “influence” personality.

NOD 2011 succeeded in motivating jaded attendees with new information. The take-home message was “Pay it forward”, and I sincerely hope that everyone who was privileged enough to attend, kept the promise that he/she made to spread the inspiration that was sparked at the conference.

Continuing on the subject of education, currently there are 26 people in South Africa studying the Glamorgan course. This is a post-graduate diploma in diabetes management. It’s of one-year duration, comprises six modules and is Internet-based. Be warned, it’s not for the faint hearted! The course requires daily log-on and considerable research, but with regard to diabetes, the rewards of self-improvement and further knowledge acquisition are priceless.

Some of our braver diabetic educators are undertaking the Cardiff course, which runs over two years. Rumour has it that the study results of the South Africa group are in the top third in the world! One of our Cardiff students, Laurie van der Merwe, won an award for top educator in 2009 and attended FENDS in 2010.

This year’s DESSA workshop promises to be a kaleidoscope of fascinating talks. Our female diabetic patients will share the spotlight. Subjects such as pregnancy, diabetic mastopathy and food for the “pink foot”, are likely to make for interesting listening. The subjects of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), antiretrovirals (ARVs) and diabetes will be covered. This should be particularly helpful, as we are all well aware of the HIV epidemic in our country. It is important to know how to manage all the patients who develop diabetes as a result of ARV treatment. The consequent dialysis, a long-term complication of diabetes, will also be discussed at length. This DESSA workshop should not to be missed.

And now for a grand announcement: the second part of the DESSA education module is to be introduced this year! To get back to my original quote, we cannot know everything, nor do everything, but we can achieve a lot by taking one step at a time. I would like to end with the words of a song:

I choose to live

...Taking the lives of our women, children and men
So I wanna be louder than the silent killer
Won’t be easy, but I’ll make it in the end
And if I make it, I know everybody can
Join a stance so we can be louder than the silent killer.

Let us join hands in the fight against the silent killer, diabetes.

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