

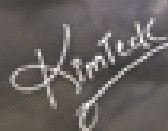
In the Eye of the Diabetes Storm

Perhaps storm is too mild a word to describe the onslaught of diabetes mellitus. The "Diabetes Tsunami" might be a more apt description. How else can we describe a disease that leaves a great trail of destruction for hundreds of millions in its wake? Which other malady is blinding, causes strokes, heart attacks, kidney failure loss of life and limb?

The statistics from the World Health Organisation is grim indeed. The diabetes population is slated to explode and double in 2030 from the current estimated 220 millions. What can be done to stamp the tide and ride the storm? One in 10 patients with diabetes is expected to have some form of diabetic eye disease (diabetic retinopathy). What can be done to reduce the damage especially for those caught in the eye of the diabetes storm? Yes, our focus in this issue is on diabetes and the eyes.

It seems but yesterday that Singapore launched a diabetic retinopathy programme using retinal cameras. In fact, the "diabetic retinal photography" programme started way back in 1991. Today, retinal photography for diabetics is as commonplace and widely available as chest X-rays. A noticeable difference between the diabetic eye clinic in those darks days and now (at least in my clinic) is the observation that the proportion of those who turn up with end stage and sight-threatening retinopathy is much reduced. It is gratifying to find more and more patients from all walks of life waving a copy of the "DRP" or asking to get their eyes checked. It beats having to tell patients that they are beyond medical help.

Have we indeed turned the tide and outrun the storm? Far from it. There has been and will be many more diabetics particularly from neighbouring countries showing up with "bad eyes". These unfortunate individuals have slipped through the screening net or have no recourse to eye screening. Many are still unaware that diabetic retinopathy continues to be a major cause of blindness or, if you like, visual impairment. What has changed in the last 20 years in terms of the treatment and management of what is probably the most devastating complications of diabetes. Find out.



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