



# Limit Complications with Good Control

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We know that diabetes kills, diabetes cripples and diabetes blinds, and we must reduce its complications with good blood sugar control.

Diabetes mellitus affecting millions in Asia will be a massive health problem. Diabetes mellitus, in particular Type 2 diabetes, will explode into a global crisis.

In some countries, Type 2 diabetes will affect up to 20% of the population. This is attributable to the global epidemic of obesity combined with a sedentary and affluent lifestyle. Factors such as lack of exercise, high blood pressure, high blood lipids and cholesterol and unhealthy dietary habits can aggravate the rise of diabetes.

The cost of diabetes can be devastating. It can bankrupt the patient and financially cripple governments as healthcare costs run into billions. As diabetes becomes more prevalent, it will affect thousands of middle-aged professionals and businessmen at the prime of their careers. Of particular importance is the serious visual loss and blindness from diabetic retinopathy. The worrying issue is that the affected countries will, as a result, be deprived of the skills of these leaders. The diabetes crisis will thus escalate into a major financial problem throughout Asia. We must act now!

Despite numerous resolutions and meetings and spending millions of dollars annually, we have not been successful in containing diabetes. It is still spreading and affecting more countries, more people.

Is our management wrong? Is it top heavy, with the specialist seeing the patient only once in six months for a mere six minutes, while the patient faces the demanding challenge of managing his diabetes every day, every hour and every minute?

How can we reduce the high costs? My proposal is that the person with diabetes, especially those who are more educated, should be encouraged not only to manage his own diabetes as a member of his diabetes team but also play a key role, nationally and internationally, to educate others about diabetes, how it should be managed and how it can possibly be prevented. It is also important to make it known as widely as possible that, with adequate treatment, the complications of diabetes can be

limited. This will help to impede the rise of diabetes, to prevent complications and to cut the number of people going blind from diabetic retinopathy.

## Costs and Nurses

Education must also play a key role in controlling the spread of diabetes. Let us also consider training nurses and volunteers to give every patient all the essential information on diabetes. We need also to inform school children or even pre-school children of the health risks of being overweight and the ills of a sedentary lifestyle (over-eating, too much fast food, hours of television and computer play; inadequate intake of fruits and vegetables and no outdoor activity). We need to convince the owners of fast food chains to produce 'safe food'. These messages must be repeatedly emphasised through frequent activities.

## Training Centres

It is also important to establish more diabetes education centres to reach the masses and teach the population about the disease, as well as help people with diabetes understand that control is in their hands.

There are compelling reasons why these training centres for education on diabetes should receive our full support. A major concern of failure of management is non-compliance – patients not following instructions.

Such centres, if established extensively within the next 10 years, will become models for every nation, for every city, so that our own people and the rest of the world can benefit.

We know from experience that no physical handicap is as destructive as diabetes, which affects the eyes (diabetic retinopathy causing blindness), the heart (causing acute heart attack), the kidneys (leading to dialysis and kidney transplant), the feet (leading to ulcers, gangrene and amputation) and the brain (leading to stroke).

Let us work together to prevent hundreds of thousands of Singaporeans from the tyranny of diabetes.

**Professor Arthur Lim**  
Patron  
Diabetic Society of Singapore