



Reducing complications in people with diabetes

NHS Highland – extending the role of healthcare workers

With the rate of diabetes expected to increase over the next 10 -15 years, it is important to train healthcare workers to ensure that they can offer consistent diagnosis and treatment across the UK.

Over 2 million people in the UK have diabetes and 750,000 people have the condition but are unaware of the problem. Severe complications can set in if people are not diagnosed early enough, or they fail to get the right care.

NHS Highland cares for 300,000 residents as well as tourists who, when visiting the region, can double or triple the population. To extend the role of its healthcare workers and cope with the rise in people with diabetes, NHS Highland used Skills for Health competences to pioneer a new 'blended' training programme for primary healthcare workers, including nurses, other clinical professionals and General Practitioners.

As well as clinical competences for diabetes, such as identifying circulatory problems and nerve damage to the feet, the Skills for Health competences also include communication skills – how to talk to patients about their condition, show them how to use insulin and agree plans for their future care.

To create the programme, NHS Highland and the University of Highlands and Islands Millennium Institute (UHI) pulled together teams of practitioners and educationalists, plus nurse specialists, dieticians and podiatrists.

The programme's innovative 'blend' of online learning and practical workshops provides a good fit for many healthcare workers pressured by time and work. Its two modules form part of the UHI's BA in Health Studies and this innovative lead is now being mirrored by Salford Primary Care Trust and Sherwood Forest Hospitals NHS Trust. Both are now developing part-time 'blended' training modules in the management of diabetes.

“With the global increasing incidence of diabetes and the thirst for knowledge to manage particularly type 2 diabetes, the development and delivery of these modules could not be timelier.”

Professor Sandra MacRury NHS Highland

A key aim of Skills for Health is to develop and manage a bank of national workforce competences which describe the performance criteria, knowledge and understanding required to carry out a work activity effectively. Because competences describe what individuals need to know and to do, regardless of who is performing the activity, they can be used in many different ways.

The Benefits

- Role of healthcare workers extended to equip them with the skills to deliver better patient care.
- More effective diagnosis and treatment to reduce the number of people developing complications.
- Increase in diagnosis and treatment close to home reduces hospital visits and drives down cost.
- 'Blended' learning approach reduces training costs and time away from patient care.
- Availability of short, competence-based modules forming part of a recognised learning programme.

With the rising incidence of diabetes Type 2 and the need to treat people closer to home there is an increasing need for healthcare workers to identify the condition as soon as possible. Skills for Health's competences are providing primary care professionals with an opportunity to do this and to reduce the number of people with diabetes who develop complications.

Skills for Health is the Sector Skills Council for the UK health sector (the National Health Services, independent healthcare providers and voluntary organisations). Our purpose is to help develop solutions that can deliver a skilled and flexible workforce to improve health and healthcare.

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