

SELF-CARE OF PEOPLE WITH TYPE 2 DIABETES DURING THE COVID PANDEMIC: A QUALITATIVE INTERPRETIVE DESCRIPTION

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Background

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, diabetes services were disrupted in Lombardy, Italy. People with Type 2 Diabetes (T2DM) faced important difficulties. Their experience is currently unexplored and knowing it could help improve diabetes care.

Aim

To explore and describe the experience of self-care of people with T2DM during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methods

This study used a qualitative Interpretive Description. Data were collected with semi-structured interviews and analysed inductively in accordance with Interpretive Description criteria. The sample (n=30) was purposefully selected and composed of seven women and 23 men, mean age 69.9 years old (60–77) and 19.4 mean years (3–40) of living with T2DM.

Results

During the pandemic, many participants reduced physical activity levels and increased smoking and alcohol consumption. Some took time for meal prepping and better eating, and some increased food consumption and stress eating. These factors, with greater stress and anxiety, caused worsening of glycaemic values. Supplies were hard for participants to procure. Many chose online shopping for food and electronic prescriptions were used for drugs. In some cases, insulin was not available and participants borrowed it from other patients using informal network. The closure of diabetes centres and the lack of reference points forced people who could afford it to turn to private healthcare. Others, even when diabetes complications arose, were not able to receive any kind of care or advice for a long time. Those who contacted a healthcare professional often did so via e-health or telephone.

Conclusion

Participants struggled both in diabetes self-care and access to services. They advised for a diabetes case manager, continuity of care, and patients' empowerment. Supplies of food, drugs, and diabetes-related devices were a concern. Technology and telehealth were useful but only for the minority capable of using them. Developing advanced nurse-led community services could solve many issues reported in this study, during and after the pandemic