



The First World Diabetes Day

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In recognition of the impact of diabetes, on 20 December 2006 the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution on diabetes, the first of its kind for a non-communicable disease. This resolution recognises diabetes as a chronic, debilitating and costly disease associated with major complications that pose severe risks for those who suffer from it and a challenge to those who treat and care for them. It also designates 14 November as United Nations World Diabetes Day, which was observed for the first time last November.

The theme for the first World Diabetes Day was diabetes in children and young people. The choice of this theme was very timely. There are an estimated 440 000 cases of type 1 diabetes in children worldwide, with more than a fifth of these living in Europe. Pre-school children with diabetes have a mortality rate up to nine times higher than their peers. But it is not just the sheer numbers that makes diabetes in young people significant. It is also the nature of the specific problems that they face.

Young people with diabetes are at risk of developing complications at a younger age if their disease is not identified and properly controlled. Complications associated with diabetes include loss of sight, kidney problems and neuropathy. Despite modern treatments, more than 50% of children with diabetes will develop complications 12 years after diagnosis. In children with poor blood glucose control, complications can occur even sooner.

But the impact of diabetes on children and young people extends beyond the health problems that are common to both young people and adults; there are psychological, emo-



tional and social challenges too. All young people and their families must come to terms with what being diagnosed with a life-long chronic condition will mean for their lives. They must learn the complexities of diabetes and how to manage it; their daily lives will be disrupted by the need to monitor blood glucose levels, take medication and to balance the effect of activity and food.

These issues highlight the need to give young people with diabetes and their carers a voice, and we must listen. This is why the EU Diabetes Working Group, in corporation with International Diabetes Federation (IDF) and International Society for Paediatric and Adolescent Diabetes (ISPAD), organised a series of high profile events to mark the first World Diabetes Day in the European Parliament.

The day commenced with the unveiling of the large three dimensional and floodlit Diabetes Blue Circle at the entrance of the Parliament building in Strasbourg. This was one of many similar events that took place at major landmarks around the world during the course the day. The list of monuments that displayed the World Diabetes Day symbol or were illuminated blue

included the Empire State Building in New York, the Leaning Tower of Pisa and the London Eye.

The key event in the Parliament starred some 20 young people who live with diabetes. They came to Strasbourg to meet MEPs, the Commissioner for Health, Markos Kyprianou, and the President of the Parliament, Hans Gert Poettering, to share their first-hand experiences. They came from 17 Member States of the EU, aged 2–20 years old. They also took part in a lunch discussion of the EU Diabetes Working Group and they really were star performers – articulate, confident and persuasive of their case. The discussion was attended by MEPs and experts in the field of paediatric diabetes. A key component of the meeting was the launching of a ‘Call to Action’, focusing on the many challenges faced by young people with diabetes. This included calls for equal access to age appropriate education and care across Europe.

The first World Diabetes Day was an opportunity to give a voice to those who are often not heard: young people and their carers. They left us with some key messages, which we will take with us. We must work to make sure that no child should die from diabetes; we must be wary of the increase of all types of diabetes in young people; and care for children is best when a multi-disciplinary approach is adopted, involving health professionals from all areas that concern children.

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