



World Diabetes Day 2008

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After just two years, we have made World Diabetes Day a regular fixture in the European Parliament. The first United Nations-recognised World Diabetes Day took place in November 2007. Events to mark the day in 2008 built on the success of the previous year, with the theme again focusing on young people with diabetes.

In November 2008, children living and achieving with diabetes from across Europe were joined in the European Parliament by successful sports stars who also live and achieve with diabetes. They included two Olympic gold medallists (Bas van der Goor from The Netherlands and Michal Jelinski from Poland) and a French national swimming champion (Paul Louis Fouesnant). With them came the current Tour de France champion, Carlos Sastre of Spain, a champion who does not live with diabetes himself, but who champions those who do.

The week's events focused on the need to address the lack of support available to children with diabetes across European schools. Levels of care and support available to children with diabetes vary significantly between countries. A recent study found that nine out of 10 children with diabetes cannot rely on a school nurse to assist them during school hours, while a shocking six out of 10 children with diabetes drop out of school earlier than other students.

These figures are all the more significant given that the number of children affected by type 1 diabetes alone is growing at the alarming rate of 3–5% each year, and that the top 10 countries, in terms of childhood diabetes incidence, are mostly European. In vivid contrast to these statistics, our Olympians and sporting



The 2008 World Diabetes Day included an impressive delegation of young people with diabetes, who attended the European Parliament

champions offered a sign of what can be achieved if children receive the type of support that they need. Not everyone can win a gold medal, but everyone should be able to achieve to the limits of their ambition in whatever field they choose.

We heard from a number of very eloquent young people who shared their experiences of daily life with diabetes, both in and out of school.

It was very positive to report several examples of good practice. Some children are lucky enough to have school nurses who can assist them. Some even have teachers who have received training on how to support children with diabetes and to understand their specific needs.

Regrettably we also heard instances where children are being denied the necessary support. Some expect to receive no support in school, owing to a lack of training, knowledge or resources, or other restrictions that mean that teachers are unable to provide assistance. This can mean that children with diabetes are being excluded from activities such as sport and outings. Consequently, parents are often under greater pressure to provide additional support.

So what is to be done? One thing is for sure: the status quo cannot be maintained. A starting point will be

to understand the scale of the problem by collecting data on the current situation in European schools. This can be followed by an exchange of information and good practice on how best to support children with diabetes, to ensure that they enjoy the same quality of schooling as their peers. Complementing this would be the development and implementation of education and information programmes, using materials that offer help and guidance to schools so that they learn how best to support children with diabetes.

Steps have been taken towards achieving these goals. We were pleased to be joined by the European Commissioner for Health, Mrs Androulla Vassiliou, who was briefed by the children who delivered a 'call to action', outlining their concerns and possible solutions. She has pledged action on this issue at a European Union level, which is so dearly needed if we are to ensure that all children with diabetes are to achieve their goals – as the Olympians who joined us that day proved is possible.

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