



The diabetes specialist nurse in Italy: from vocation to profession

LV Marongiu*

Introduction

In recent years the professional status of nurses in Italy has undergone remarkable development. University courses now offer a nursing degree equivalent to those granted by other medical professions. These advances are reflected by an increase in specialised nursing but, most of all, in the increasing recognition of the professional role of specialist nurses.

The Italian Diabetes Health Workers Association (OSDI, *Operatori Sanitari di Diabetologia Italiani*) comprises nearly all nurses in Italy who work primarily in the field of diabetes. The Association represents this specialised field of nursing in Italy which, owing to the evolution of the entire profession, is focused upon providing high quality care in line with European standards.

History of the Italian Diabetes Health Workers Association (OSDI)

In 1987, a handful of nurses in Venice, aware of the specialised nature and importance of their role in diabetes care but dissatisfied with their own level of knowledge, decided to join forces. They formed

Abstract

In recent years professional nurse training has developed from a vocational course of study to a nursing science degree. Specific professional education in diabetes care is being developed by the Italian Diabetes Health Workers Association (OSDI). Copyright © 2005 FEND.

Eur Diabetes Nursing 2005; 2(2): 84–86.

Key words

diabetes mellitus; education; specialist nurses; Italy

a regional association (ARVOSD, *Associazione Regionale Veneta Operatori Sanitari Diabetologici*) aimed at increasing the skills of all nurses working in the field of diabetes.

Two years later due to increasing interest it was decided to expand the Association nationally and to further enhance this nursing specialty by encouraging professional training and continuing education. OSDI was subsequently founded in Venice in October 1989; although growth was quite slow at first, by 2003 OSDI had more than 1200 members.

Today, OSDI has a national headquarters and 15 autonomous regional sections, each with its own board of directors (who are unpaid). Since 1994 it has organised biennial national conferences, each around a specific topic, and provides an opportunity to discuss the proceedings of the annual regional conferences. Participation in the national conference has increased along with membership; in 2004 more than 60% of the members attended the national conference in Sorrento.

The Association is primarily concerned with developing knowledge and training of diabetes specialist nurses. The official journal of OSDI is the trimonthly *Il Diabete & l'Infermiere* (Editor, Dr Domenico

Fedele), which publishes original articles as well as Association news and regional bulletins. As with many other spheres in Italy, nursing organisation varies from region to region. In addition, OSDI produces a range of printed and visual materials.

The Association's most important activity involves the training of health care personnel. In the last few years it has collaborated closely with other institutions, such as the *Associazione Italiana Medici Diabetologi* (AMD, Italian Association of Diabetes Physicians) and its related training school, and also with the *Società Italiana di Diabetologia* (SID, Italian Society of Diabetology) and with the *Gruppo Interassociativo di Infermieri* (GPAIN, Interassociative Nursing Group). It also participates in the *Progetto Diabete* work group (in collaboration with the National Health Service). Perhaps the most important step was the establishment of OSDI srl, a limited society devoted to setting up events and training courses in accordance with national continuing medical educational requirements.

The evolution of the profession and university study

The recent developments in nursing were the consequence of a need to consolidate and evaluate the role

Author

Lucia V Marongiu, DN, Head Nurse, Diabetes Division, Ospedale Zonchello, Nuoro, Italy

*Correspondence to: LV Marongiu, DN, Head Nurse, Diabetes Division, Ospedale Zonchello, Nuoro, Italy; e-mail: luciavincenza.marongiu@tin.it



of the specialist nurse in relation to a wider evolution in health care. This is mainly linked to technological progress in medicine, but is also related to recent immigration from Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe, which has brought about demographic change and new health problems. Consequently, there is a need for qualified responses in basic care, but also in prevention and rehabilitation. This is all tied to a continuing need for personalised, high-quality health care.

The growth of professional nursing in Italy is sustained by a new training programme: the title of Registered Nurse (conferred up to 1999 and qualifying the nurse after a vocational course of study) has been replaced by a nursing science degree, which involves further levels of study based on recent university reforms. Following the first-level degree, it is possible to choose between various postgraduate courses: a specialist degree, a master's degree, or a doctorate of research (Figure 1).

Nurses are acquiring new roles and responsibilities, and further resources will be needed for training and teaching at both basic and postgraduate levels. These would allow nursing specialisation based on the desire for professional and cultural growth and on the technological innovations with which nursing is constantly faced.

The diabetes specialist nurse: a challenge for the entire profession

Although the evolution of nursing has been positive, there are some inadequacies in the laws regarding specialist training for diabetes nurses in Italy. University education for nurses in diabetes care takes place during a three-year course, based on teaching modules set up within the specific field of endocrinology. However, in post-

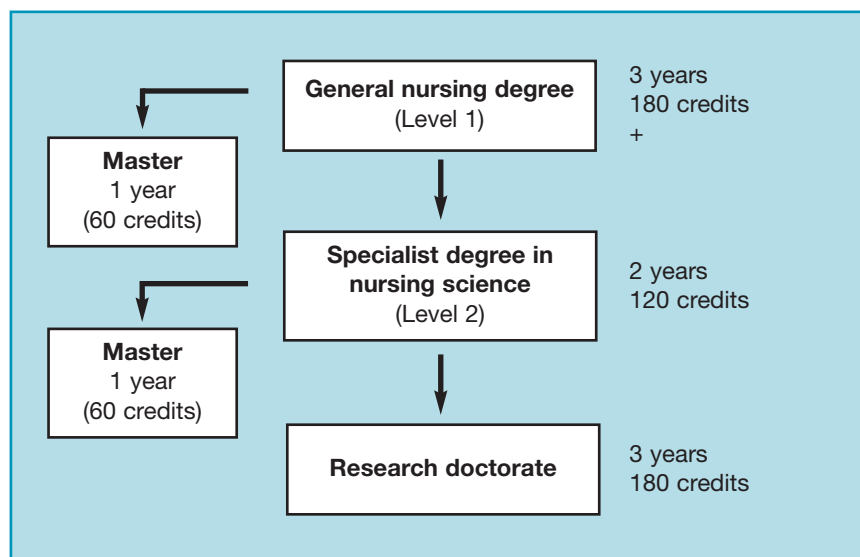


Figure 1. University nurse training in Italy

graduate courses, diabetes education is part of geriatrics. No recognised specialisation is provided and currently diabetes specialist nursing is characterised by professional experience, self-teaching and training seminars organised by societies and scientific associations. In Italy, the statutory aims of the OSDI include promoting the training and continuing education of diabetes nurses, and supporting training opportunities in this specialised field. OSDI has responded by establishing a Permanent Training School (*Scuola di Formazione Permanente*) in Bologna, which offers training courses in all aspects of diabetes nursing.

In 2004, in order to better understand and respond to their members' needs, OSDI drew up and distributed a questionnaire to 350 members in 17 regions, to which 223 nurses (64%; mean age 43 years [range 36–50 years]; 82% female) responded. Of the 223 respondents, the majority (72%) had been working in the field of diabetes care for more than 10 years (37% over 20 years), and in most cases (78%) were employed in a Division for Diabetes and Metabolic Diseases (UO, *Unita Operativa*).

A picture of Italian diabetes nursing emerged from the results, showing that the hospital units devoted to diabetes care are usually medium-sized departments functioning during five to six working days per week. The typical staff (in around half of these units) consists of two to four physicians (in Italy there is one diabetologist per 1500 people), two to four nurses, and one dietician – although the latter is absent in 43% of the cases. Usually the nurse and doctor deal with nutritional education. The nurse's teaching role primarily relates to self-blood glucose testing, and providing education about different therapies, exercise and complications such as the diabetic foot. However, it is still the physician who is responsible for providing more detailed information about acute and chronic complications and for providing pre-gestational counselling.

Education for the person with diabetes takes place in nearly all diabetes care services, but only 69% of the nurses who responded to the questionnaire stated they had undertaken specific courses in therapeutic education. Based on these responses, we conclude that the educational approach most often prac-



tised is more instructional than educational. This underlines the need to continue the Association's training programmes, particularly those dealing with therapeutic education. However, there are also other areas in which the nurses interviewed felt the need for further knowledge: patient counselling (dietary, pregnancy, physical activity), screening for chronic complications, and very importantly nursing research, still undeveloped in our country.

Conclusions

Interpretation of this survey has allowed the OSDI Permanent

Training School to focus on practical aims, by planning activities that respond to the organisation's goal of continuing professional education. Unquestionably, the School's main purpose is to promote the continual improvement of high-quality assistance for people with diabetes. The Association now operates within a wider European context where interaction facilitates the awareness and diffusion of innovative nursing models. The journal *Il Diabete & l'Infermiere* has encouraged OSDI to publicise its mission. It has also facilitated contact between OSDI and FEND through

collaboration with Mrs Anne-Marie Felton (Chairman of FEND). Acknowledgments are due to the current Board of Directors and especially to the President of OSDI, Ms Rosanna Toniato, for believing in the Association's potential, recognising its strengths, and to the Diabetes Service Nursing Science professionals who set up the Training School.

Further information on Italian diabetes nursing can be obtained from the OSDI website: <http://www.osdi.it/>

Dates for your Diary

5–8 October 2005

Partnerships for Health, European Health Forum, Bad Hofgastein, Austria. **Contact:** European Health Forum, International Forum Gastein, Tauernplatz 1, 5630 Bad Hofgastein, Austria. **Tel:** +43 (6432) 3393 270, **fax:** +43 (6432) 3393 271, **e-mail:** info@ehfg.org, **website:** www.ehfg.org

17–19 November 2005

3rd World Congress on Insulin Resistance Syndrome, San Francisco, California, USA. **Contact:** Metabolic Endocrine Education Foundation, 18372 Clark Street, Suite 212, Tarzana, CA 91356, USA. **Tel:** +818 342 1889, **fax:** +818 342 1538, **website:** www.insulinresistance.us

25–26 November 2005

RCN Paediatric Diabetes Group annual conference, The Cheltenham Park Hotel, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, UK. **Contact:** Kathryn Clark, RCN Events, 20 Cavendish Square, London W1G 0RN. **Tel:** +44 (0)20 7647 3585, **fax:** +44 (0)20 7647 3411, **e-mail:** paediatricdiabetes@rcn.org.uk

10 December 2005

Managing Obesity: The health professional's role, Royal College of Nursing HQ, London, UK. **Contact:** Priya Tekchandani, 20 Cavendish Square, London. **Tel:** +44 (0)207 647 3581, **fax:** +44 (0)207 647 3411, **e-mail:** priya.tekchandani@rcn.org.uk

29–31 March 2006

Diabetes UK Annual Professional Conference, International Convention Centre, Birmingham, UK. **Contact:** Diabetes UK, 10 Parkway, London NW1 7AA, UK. **Tel:** +44(0)20 7424 1157/1158/1156/1160, **fax:** +44(0)20 7424 1081, **e-mail:** conferences@diabetes.org.uk, **website:** www.diabetes.org.uk

27–30 April 2006

Therapeutic Patient Education 2006 including 3rd International DAWN Summit, Florence, Italy. **Contact:** Conference Secretariat, Kenes International, 17 Rue du Cendrier, PO Box 1726, CH-1211 Geneva 1, Switzerland. **Tel:** +41 22 908 0488, **fax:** +41 22 732 2850, **e-mail:** tpe2006@kenes.com, **website:** www.kenes.com/tpe2006

9–12 August 2006

33rd Annual meeting of the American Association of Diabetes Educators (AADE), Los Angeles, CA. **Contact:** AADE, 100 West Monroe Street, Suite 400, Chicago, Illinois 60603, USA. **Tel:** +1 800 338 3633

12–13 September 2006

Federation of European Nurses in Diabetes (FEND) 11th Annual Conference, Hotel Hvide Hus, Copenhagen, Denmark. **Contact:** Sari Rodriguez, Seljatie 10, 36200 Kangasala, Finland. **Tel:** +358 50 408 7021,

fax: +358 3 379 1589, **e-mail:** Rodriguez@kolumbus.fi

14–17 September 2006

42nd Annual Meeting of the European Association for the Study of Diabetes (EASD), Malmö, Copenhagen, Denmark. **Contact:** EASD Secretariat, Rheindorfer Weg 3, D-40591 Dusseldorf, Germany. **Tel:** +49 11 7584690, **fax:** +49 211 75846929, **e-mail:** secretariat@easd.org, **website:** www.easd.org

3–7 December 2006

International Diabetes Federation 19th World Diabetes Congress, Cape Town International Convention Centre, Cape Town, South Africa. **Contact:** 19th World Diabetes Congress, IDF, Congress Unit, Avenue Emile De Mot 19, B-1000 Brussels, Belgium. **Tel:** +32 2 5431631, **fax:** +32 2 5385114, **e-mail:** WorldDiabetesCongress@idf.org, **website:** www.IDF2006.org

If you know of a forthcoming conference relevant to the readership of FEND, we should be delighted if you would send details to the Editorial Office of *European Diabetes Nursing* (e-mail: EDN@wiley.co.uk, fax: +44 (0) 1243 770144). Please give us information on the dates and title of the conference, where it is taking place and the contact details for registration