

## Diabetes – a Growing Worldwide Healthcare Crisis

Diabetes mellitus (DM) is a global epidemic, and has the potential to cause a worldwide healthcare crisis. Diabetes currently affects 246 million people worldwide and is expected to affect 380 million by 2025, according to estimates by the International Diabetes Federation (IDF). Mexico is within the top 10 prevalence rates worldwide, affecting at least 10% of the general population, rising to an alarming 1 in 4 over age 50. In fact, the globalization of high fat diets and sedentary lifestyles will shift the global diabetes burden to developing countries by 2025.

## Project HOPE's Response

Project HOPE has been active in diabetes since 1998 when a national training program was launched in China. In 2001, the Mexico program began with a national assessment to investigate why diabetes had become one of Mexico's leading causes of death. Over the years, a successful health worker training program to improve patient education was expanded to address "diabesity" prevention, as Mexico has the highest rate of childhood obesity in the world and rising obesity rates is one of the main contributors to rising rates of diabetes, beginning in childhood.

## Program Initiatives

### Developing Effective Patient Education: 5 Steps to Self Care

Project HOPE developed a comprehensive patient education course for people with diabetes and at-risk in response to alarming national mortality rates. The *5 Steps to Self-Care* course was developed, tested and shown to be effective at lowering average blood sugar and improving overall "well-being" among participants with diabetes or at risk. Adopted by 25 government health centers serving over 1 million people in the Mexico City metropolitan area, the course has helped over 150 multidisciplinary health workers become more effective educators, achieving the same clinical and quality of life improvements in their patient courses as HOPE trainers. *5 Steps* is a fully scripted, highly visual, game-based course proven effective with participants from ages 12 to 82, across socio-economic and literacy levels. The course was designed to accommodate the limited literacy of 1 in 3 older adults. This is particularly important as diabetes rates increase with age – to 1 in 4 over age 50 and 1 in 3 over age 65. Recognized as a "global model" by the International Diabetes Federation (IDF) in 2005 (DAWN Award finalist), the course is currently being adapted for diabetes initiatives in Nicaragua and New Mexico.



### Promoting Peer Education & Community Mobilization



Patients completing at least 70% of the 24 hour *5 Steps* course receive a graduation certificate. Over 2,000 patients have graduated to date. All participants complete weekly homework assignments that include sharing what they have learned with others, using guided outreach materials. This activity motivates many to continue sharing beyond course end, spurring a peer education movement. Peers use *5 Steps* materials to share information about risk factors, the importance of regular screening, healthy eating and exercise at church, work and in the community. In fact, a group of dedicated peers staff screening and education modules in high traffic public places like markets and subway stations, while others offer free exercise classes in the local park. In 2007, Project HOPE participated in a World Health Organization expert consultation, leading to a publication calling for further research on the promise of peer support. Project HOPE continues to participate in this effort, believing that community mobilization is essential to combat the diabetes epidemic. In 2009, HOPE collaborated with the National University (UNAM) to initiate a 250-hour Peer Education Certificate Program.

## “Diabesity” Awareness and Prevention in School Children



Obesity is a global health crisis that contributes to the diabetes pandemic. The term “diabesity” was coined to raise awareness that the two diseases are related. 1 in 3 school children in Mexico is overweight or obese and the National University (UNAM) reports that of children entering adolescence obese, 80% are likely to remain obese for life. In 2007-2008, Project HOPE launched a “Healthy Habits for Healthy Weight” initiative targeting pre-pubescent third grade children, 9-10 years old. Targeting an annual cohort for the last 3 years, HOPE has reached nearly 3,000 school children, along with their parents and teachers. Preliminary results indicate increased adoption of 3 key healthy habits (more fruits and vegetables, more water, and more exercise) in school and at home for both children and their families. Returning yearly to collect follow up data, the initial cohort of 1,252 children has demonstrated a fall in baseline obesity from 13% to 10% over 2 years.

## Selected Recognition & Publications

- Mexico’s “5 Steps to Self-Care” patient education course was recognized as a “global model” by the International Diabetes Federation (IDF) in 2005 (DAWN Award finalist)
- Project HOPE Mexico participated in a WHO expert consultation, which led to a publication calling for further research on the promise of peer support
- Peer Education Certificate Program adopted by the National University (UNAM)

## Success Story

### Improving Health Through Shared Experiences



Educating patients with real knowledge about managing and preventing diabetes empowers them to not only make their own lives healthier, but to share information with family, friends and neighbors. Gilberta Pelaez and Consuelo Rodriguez offer a powerful example of the positive influence peer educators can have on a community. Both women graduated from HOPE’s 5 Steps course and went on to complete the 250-hour Peer Educator Certificate Program. Both women are now community leaders, running weekly outreach tables in front of a subway, a government clinic and a market. Each detects a person with undiagnosed diabetes every day, often with dangerous blood sugar levels (400-500 mg/dl), indicating years of undiagnosed diabetes and a high risk for developing complications like blindness and kidney failure. Consuelo explains the impact her own struggle with the disease has on the people she meets on the street. “When I tell them I have had diabetes for 20 years, they are surprised,” Consuelo says. “I tell them that I have learned to live well with diabetes and they can, too.”

## Future Directions

Given the growing diabetes problem throughout the world, Project HOPE will continue to expand its advances in chronic diseases like diabetes in Mexico, China, India. Our latest initiative incorporates telehealth technology to grow access to diabetes education in New Mexico.

For more information,  
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