

Group Medical Visits for Chronic Diseases

The editors of *AFP* welcome submissions for Close-ups. Guidelines for contributing to this feature can be found in the Authors' Guide at <http://www.aafp.org/afp/authors>.

This series is coordinated by Caroline Wellbery, MD, Associate Deputy Editor, with assistance from Amy Crawford-Faucher, MD; Jo Marie Reilly, MD; and Sanaz Majd, MD.

A collection of Close-ups published in *AFP* is available at <http://www.aafp.org/afp/closeups>.

I have been living with diabetes for more than 30 years and there's never a dull moment. When I was younger, I would watch my mother give herself insulin shots and take medicines for her diabetes. Even though I was familiar with the disease, it was really challenging when the doctor told me I had it. Since then, it has been difficult to keep my blood sugars under control.

Going to my regular doctors' visits was usually frustrating. I felt like the appointments just weren't working for me, and I really wasn't happy. The doctors and nurses would tell me what I needed to do, but I never felt they had the time to listen to what I was going through. It became a lot easier to learn about my diabetes once I started going to group visits. I've had a lot of experiences with different doctors and clinics, but they were nothing like the group visits.

I started going to these visits because I wanted to learn how to get my blood sugars more under control. I walked away with much more than I expected. Every month I was learning something different, which kept me coming back. A few of the more helpful visits were those focused on new foods and recipes, different types of exercise, and eating in moderation.

The best part about group visits was the people. I had plenty of time to ask questions and talk to others with diabetes who made me realize that it isn't always easy to change bad habits. I didn't feel alone anymore. I felt like there was a whole group of people who supported me and cared about my health. They encouraged me to stop smoking and to drink water instead of pop. We were all going through different things, but our challenges were the same. We had good times together and that made me look forward to returning. Since I started going to group visits, my blood sugars have been much more under control, and for me, this has been the biggest benefit.—V.T.



COMMENTARY

The impact of group medical visits is illustrated with this story. Family physicians are in an ideal position to lead a multidisciplinary team in delivering chronic disease care to groups of patients. Group medical visits can increase patient and physician satisfaction, improve diabetes-related outcomes, and decrease hospitalizations. This type of visit is also a billable service.

Challenges to establishing group medical visits include dedicating time to plan the visits, building a constructive team to facilitate sessions, creating an effective patient education curriculum, and gaining administration support. With time and experience, the visits can be tailored to specific patient populations, medical conditions, and a clinic's available resources.

The relationships that are formed among the patients and health care professionals are instrumental in making

positive behavior changes. Group medical visits create ample opportunities to provide in-depth education and strengthen the bonds we share with our patients.

KRISHNA M. DESAI, MD, and SCOTT W. BRAGG, PharmD

RESOURCES

American Academy of Family Physicians

<http://www.aafp.org/dam/AAFP/documents/patient-care/fitness/GroupVisitAIM.pdf>

Greater Flint Health Coalition

http://www.gfhc.org/cp_diabetes_group_visit.html

Jaber R, Braksmaier A, Trilling J. Group visits for chronic illness care: models, benefits and challenges. *Fam Pract Manag*. 2006;13(1):37-40. ■