



Peers for Progress

Peer Support Around the World

A program of the American Academy of Family Physicians Foundation

Project Spotlight

Peer Support for U.S. College Students with Type 1 Diabetes

The College Diabetes Network in the United States



COLLEGE DIABETES NETWORK

Due to its rarity, Type 1 diabetes can be a frightening and overwhelming experience. Peer support interventions in the United States have a long history of providing practical, emotional and ongoing support for children and adolescents with Type 1 diabetes and their families. However, young adults with Type 1 diabetes at colleges don't always get the resources or support needed to help them navigate the challenges of college life. There are approximately 30,800 U.S. undergraduate college students living with Type 1 diabetes at any given time. They are often isolated, at risk of depression, and limited when it comes to receiving adequate

health care, counseling or round-the-clock nutritional options. Considered the first of its kind, the College Diabetes Network (CDN), a national non-profit organization, shares its strategies and experience in creating support networks, web-based resources and collaborating with others to serve this particular population.

To address the unmet needs of the college students with Type 1 diabetes, CDN focuses on identifying, building as well as strengthening supportive networks which are known as "chapters" at schools. Rooted in peer support, chapters are created and run by student volunteers and aim to provide a way for students to meet in person and connect, talk, laugh, and vent about life with diabetes on campus. CDN invites existing groups to join the CDN network which is to be registered as a CDN chapter, and also helps walk students through how to start one if there is not yet a group on campus. There is an online directory housed in the CDN website so the students can easily locate a chapter at their schools. CDN supports its chapters by providing up-to-date information tailored to the needs of college students, and offers web-based utilities (e.g. webpage, CDN email address that can be passed down as students graduate). CDN currently has about [19 chapters](#) located throughout the country and one in Canada. All of these chapters are different and based on what each particular group and their members are interested in. However, CDN does offer support and suggestions as to different events, meetings, speakers, etc. With growing recognition of the CDN's organization and collaborative efforts on a local level, CDN will be able to help individual chapters to more fully and permanently establish themselves both in the community and on campus.

Another key focus of CDN is to develop web-based resources to maximize impact. The CDN website (<http://www.collegediabetesnetwork.org/>) intends to be the hub where students with diabetes and their stakeholders can get needed information and connect with each other. With various audiences' needs in mind, the types of information and functionalities are different. For students, it targets all aspects of life with diabetes on campus, including scholarships, studying abroad, nutrition, exercise, research, and available technologies. It provides student volunteers advice on starting and running a chapter. Web-based discussion boards offer parents the opportunity to connect with each other and cope effectively with the transition of having their children move away from home. CDN is updating the section for university administrators on how they can proactively implement changes to make life on campus less challenging for students with diabetes.

Within only a few short years, CDN has grown from a small student group run by a full-time college student in 2009 to a national non-profit organization. This is due to not only an increasing interest from both the student population and professional organizations, but also its willingness to collaborate with



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others. CDN has collaborations with many major organizations in the diabetes community, and showcases the resources that other organizations already have available. Also, CDN is currently working with University of Massachusetts Amherst, Dr. Emma Dundon of the nursing department, Baystate Children's Hospital, and Big Brother Big Sister of Hampden County to develop a diabetes mentor pilot program. Through this program, students with Type 1 diabetes will receive academic credit to be a mentor to a child or adolescent with diabetes in the Springfield, MA area. This collaborative project aims to collect data on mentors, mentees, and the effect of the relationship on both and hopefully can provide the scientific foundation enabling CDN to recreate similar projects in affiliation with other chapters across the country.

As next steps, CDN plans to further grow the chapter base through early intervention with high school students prior to leaving for college by collaborating with health care centers, other organizations, and the diabetes online community. CDN is also hoping to implement an annual CDN retreat, where chapter leaders and CDN members are able to get together and discuss ways in which chapters can empower other students living with the disease. This will be an opportunity to discuss chapter management, collaboration with local organizations and community groups in order to help chapters establish themselves, and ways to better serve their present and future members. Last but not least, within the next few months CDN will have a published "Chapter Toolkit" - a step by step guide on how to start, establish, and run a chapter. Upon its completion, this "Chapter Toolkit" will be shared on the Peers for Progress website.

To learn more about the CDN, please visit <http://www.collegediabetesnetwork.org/>, or contact Christina Roth (croth@collegediabetesnetwork.org), Founder and President of CDN.