

Care and Monitoring of the Confused Patient with Diabetes Mellitus

Demographics

16 million Americans have Diabetes Mellitus (DM). It is especially prevalent among people over 65 years of age. It is estimated that 8.8% have Type II diabetes and that 15% of the nursing home population have DM and is the 4th leading cause of death in the United States.

Diabetes Mellitus contributes to about 50% of heart attacks, 75% of strokes, 30% of kidney dialysis patients, 75% of diabetic patients eventually die of vascular disease, it is the leading cause of non traumatic amputation and it is the leading cause of new blindness.

Hispanic, African-American and some Native American populations have much higher rates of diabetes than the Caucasian population. Some Native American populations, such as the Pima, have adult diabetes rates of up to 65%.

DM is an incurable disease, untreated it can lead to coma and death.

The Basics

Before we can cover the care and monitoring of confused persons with Diabetes Mellitus, we need to review some of the basics of the disease.

Types of Diabetes Mellitus most frequently encountered with the elderly

The two major types of diabetes are *insulin dependent diabetes mellitus (Type I)* and *non insulin dependent diabetes mellitus (Type II)*.

Insulin dependent diabetes mellitus (IDDM) also known as Type I or Juvenile diabetes accounts for approximately 5% to 10% of all diabetics (or approximately 1 million people), it usually occurs before the age of 25 but, may develop in older adults, and is characterized by a lack of insulin or by insufficient insulin production.

The patient with IDDM will require dietary management and regular insulin injections to achieve control.

Non insulin dependent diabetes mellitus (NIDDM), also known as Type II or adult-onset diabetes accounts for 90% - 95% of all persons with diabetes, it usually develops after the age of 40, is common in older adults and is characterized by impaired insulin secretion and/or ineffective use of insulin in the tissues (insulin resistance).

The treatment for the patient with NIDDM may be limited to diet and exercise alone, or may be combined with oral hypoglycemic medication and/or insulin.

It is important to recognize that non insulin dependent (Type II) diabetics may require insulin injections to achieve control.

Less common forms of diabetes mellitus effecting America's elderly population include *DM associated with other conditions or syndromes (also known as secondary diabetes)* and *Impaired glucose tolerance (IGT) also known as borderline or pre-diabetes*.

Diabetes Mellitus associated with other conditions or syndromes (secondary diabetes) is a form of diabetes which accompanies conditions known or suspected to cause the disease such as pancreatitis, hormonal disorder drugs such as glucocorticoids (Prednisone among others) and estrogen-containing preparations.

The treatment for the person with secondary diabetes is much the same as for the person with NIDDM, it may be limited to diet and exercise alone, or may be combined with oral hypoglycemic medication and/or insulin.

Impaired glucose tolerance (IGT) or borderline diabetes exhibits abnormalities in glucose levels intermittently between normal and overt diabetes. It can progress to overt diabetes or remain unchanged. These patients require periodic screening for the disease.