

# DIABETES EDUCATORS: TIPS FOR REACHING PRESCRIBERS

One of the biggest challenges diabetes educators face is reaching providers and prescribers. While AADE's research shows diabetes education is generally highly regarded by doctors, nurse practitioners and physician assistants, it's only recommended on average for just 62 percent of their patients. And, it is not always recommended as strongly as it could be. Some providers and prescribers are not aware of local programs or of diabetes education at all. And yet, diabetes educators can play a vital role in supporting prescribers and their patients.

Diabetes educators can help:

- **Increase a practice's efficiency** by assuming time-consuming patient training, counseling and follow up duties
- **Help a prescriber meet pay-for-performance** and quality improvement goals
- **Track and monitor patients' care** and provide status reports
- **Help delay the onset of diabetes** with prevention and self-management training for patients at high risk
- **Monitor the response to treatment** and make recommendations for treatment plan adjustments
- **Assist with training patients** on new devices and technology
- **Be a role model** for new clinicians beginning their educator career

This resource guide is designed to address this challenge. It includes tips and tactics to help you reach prescribers and features advice and success stories from your colleagues about how they have made inroads in getting patient referrals and becoming part of the larger healthcare team.



## THIS GUIDE COVERS HOW TO:

- **Build Your Contacts**
- **Maintain Ongoing Communications**
- **Showcase Your Expertise**
- **Have Others Sing Your Praises**
- **Tap All Your Resources**
- **Share Your Stories and the Stories of Your Patients**

# BUILD YOUR CONTACTS

- **Make a list** of your colleagues, physicians and other prescribers in your area. Consider ways to communicate with each group, including:

- Short emails
- Phone calls
- Brief in-person meetings
- Regular mail
- Social media

Each of these groups can benefit from hearing from you about what you are doing to help patients, but you might need to tell each in a different way. For example, a prescriber might like to hear from you via a letter sent by regular mail. Other diabetes educators in your area might like to network on Facebook. Visiting prescribers quarterly is a good way to stay top of mind. Variety is key in reaching these groups and keeping you at the front of their minds.

Keep track of the list in a central location and flag the contacts you need to pursue. Depending on what's best for you, you can use a contact management site, an Excel spreadsheet, or even index cards with names and dates written on them. As you visit practices, collect business cards from key people in the office.

- **Create key messages** about your services and make sure you are consistent in all your communications with prescribers about what you can do for them. In a 2010 article in *AADE in Practice*, diabetes educator Kim Gauthier, RD, CDE and Traci Johnson, MA, RN, CDE, shared that the key message of their marketing plan was "diabetes education saves providers time, is a Medicare/Medicaid benefit and keeps patients safe." Although they used many different approaches to deliver it, that message was part of all their communications. Developing your own key message is a good way to make yourself stand out from the crowd. Plus, repetition helps people remember you.
- **Develop a one-page document that's easy to read and highlights the services you provide.** You can supplement this with a one-page listing of other helpful materials, like a event calendar, tip sheet, etc. You can post this information to your website if you have one.

- **Create a referral order** that highlights the services you can provide, such as lifestyle coaching, assistance with fear of hypoglycemia or hypoglycemia unawareness, pump training, etc.
- **Find out who provides the education** at the prescriber's office. If it's not the prescriber, and that's where you're focused, you're talking to the wrong person. Your message is going to be most meaningful to the one whose job you are going to make easier. Focus on that person, and they will do the leg work of communicating with the prescriber the details of what you need them to know.
- **Think creatively about where you can highlight your services.** Doctors aren't the only ones who can prescribe. And even if someone can't prescribe diabetes education, they may have inroads with a prescriber.

For example, talk to the pharmacists in your area about offering diabetes education through their pharmacy. "Since many pharmacists are business owners, they may also be in a position to provide an employment opportunity for a diabetes educator to deliver DSME in a non-traditional environment but one that is visited by the diabetes patient two-three times a month," said Teresa L. Pearson, MS, RN, CDE, FFAADE in a 2012 article in *AADE in Practice*. Pharmacists also have long-established physician relationships that may help with referrals.

Also consider talking to social workers and nursing home directors, for example. They may be able to help you reach prescribers.
- **Include physician assistants and nurses** in addition to doctors in your outreach. These healthcare professionals need to know how you can help, and more importantly, they can make referrals.
- **Consider partnering with vendors** on events they may be offering such as community health fairs, and use social media to promote the event, says Dana Armstrong, RD, CDE. You can provide your expertise in exchange for having the opportunity to reach prescribers and patients.

# MAINTAIN ONGOING COMMUNICATIONS

- **Don't just reach out once – keep up your communications with prescribers.** Set up a schedule to make sure you are in touch regularly. "If at first you don't get support from those to whom you reach out, don't be afraid to reach out again and again at later dates," says Sandra Bollinger, PharmD, FASCP, CGP, CDE, CFts, CPT. "But if you start making an impression on patients one by one, it will all add up. You'll eventually make an impression on those that originally didn't embrace your efforts, simply through the patients that you touched sharing the difference that you've made in their lives." (From "On Your Own: The Challenges and Benefits of Entrepreneurship" article in the May 2013 issue of *AADE in Practice*)
- **Include a variety of methods** in the way you communicate (as noted above), and keep track for each prescriber you work with which method of communication leads to the best results.
- **Show the prescriber you understand** who they treat. For example, if your prescriber treats a large number of Latino patients, reference in your communications what you are well-versed on cultural factors that may influence a Latino patient's health or lifestyle. Offer to provide materials in Spanish ([AADE offers worksheets on the AADE Seven Self-Care Behaviors](#) that are free to download.)
- **Track and acknowledge the referrals** you receive. Prescribers want to know how patients are doing. This also offers a great opportunity to work with prescribers to encourage them to ask patients about what they are learning and ensure they continue working with you for their full course of education.
- **Consider using the fax.** Sometimes old school communication works best – many medical practices still rely on fax machines. Make sure you use that method, too.
- If you have a website, make sure you **describe diabetes education** so that both potential patients and prescribers understand it.
- **Get feedback.** You can use free services like [SurveyMonkey](#) to do online surveys once a year on how you're doing, areas for improvement, preferred communication methods, etc. Collect quantitative and qualitative feedback. If you get good results, be sure to share them. For example, if 95 percent of the prescribers you work with say you are doing an excellent job, incorporate that into the materials you send to new prescribers.

## PERSISTENCE PAYS OFF

“ If at first you don't get support from those to whom you reach out, don't be afraid to reach out again and again at later dates. ”

SANDRA BOLLINGER, PHARMD,  
FASCP, CGP, CDE, CFTS, CPT

# SHOWCASE YOUR EXPERTISE

- **Invite prescribers to observe your classes.** Those who see the depth of engagement and information offered can be confident in their referrals to you.
- **Offer short sessions** where you **visit a practice** and give brief updates or informational sessions. These often can be done during a lunch hour. Possible topics could include:
  - Top Questions Asked by Diabetes Patients (and the answers)
  - Gadgets and gizmos – the latest in diabetes tools
  - Seasonal topics, such as tips prescribers can give to diabetes patients during the holidays, or as travel tips for summer vacation season
- In a similar approach, **consider a variety of ideas for patient classes**, including cooking with diabetes, grocery store tours, carb counting and gestational diabetes, and be sure to let prescribers know of your offerings.
- **Offer a Diabetes Day** where patients and prescribers can come by for more information. Partner with other organizations to make it a fair.
- See if there are **meetings of local physicians** in your area (like a local medical society) and offer to provide a session on the latest diabetes news or one of the topics described above.
- **Ask a prescriber for a “tough” case** – a patient that has struggled previously. This will help you demonstrate how effective you can be.

# HAVE OTHERS SING YOUR PRAISES

- **Ask your patients to share their positive experience** with their prescriber. Remind them that medical professionals want to hear good news from them about their health, too, not only the difficulties.
- If you have a strong connection to a specialist and would like to work more with a primary care practices, **ask the doctor to speak to his or her colleagues**. Medical professionals often enjoy hearing from their peers. Many endocrinologists are asked to be speakers at local conferences and it's great to have them stress the importance of diabetes educators during their talks.
- **Help your patients spread the word** about what you do, too. Give them extra copies of your business card to pass along. Participate in social media sites or review sites like Angie's List.

## REMEMBER

**YOU HAVE MUCH TO OFFER PRESCRIBERS AND THEIR DIABETES PATIENTS**

By using a combination of approaches and being persistent, you can spread the word of how you can support them and empower patients.

# TAP ALL YOUR RESOURCES AND CREATE YOUR OWN

- If you aren't currently **working with your local hospital** or the major medical centers in your area, call the general number of the hospital and ask who to speak with about services for patients with diabetes. Also reach out to physicians, advance practice registered nurses, physician assistants and office managers.
- Consider **distributing items** prescribers can use like preprinted script pads, magnets with your contact information, posters, etc.
- **Access** to your colleagues – "I think the best resources to help educators excel are other educators," said Laura Shane McWhorter, PharmD, BCPS, CDE, BD-ADM, FASCP, FAADE, in an interview she gave to AADE *in Practice* newsletter in 2011. AADE offers a variety of ways you can learn what other diabetes educators are doing across the country:
  - Attend AADE's **Annual Conference**
  - Join your state coordinating body and local networking groups – find information through AADE's **MY AADE NETWORK**
  - Read AADE's **blog**
  - Connect with AADE on social media ([Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#))
  - Read AADE's various publications: *AADE in Practice* practice journal, *The Diabetes Educator* clinical journal and monthly newsletter

## SHARE YOUR STORY AND THE STORIES OF YOUR PATIENTS

- While prescribers are often moved by data and scientific information, it's often the **stories of patients that will stay with them** long after a statistic has slipped their minds. Be sure to tell stories of the patients you have helped. While you want to respect patient privacy, share as many details as you can so the prescribers you are speaking with can understand and relate to the story.
- It's also helpful for prescribers to know how you stay abreast of the latest news and trends in diabetes. **Share sources that you find useful** and make copies of materials you think they might find helpful. It's difficult for any medical professional to keep up with all the latest research, so call out articles you think are particularly useful or important.