

# Enhancing Patient Engagement in Managing Diabetic Foot – A Crucial Step in Diabetes Care

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Diabetes mellitus is a chronic illness that affects millions of people worldwide, with one of its most severe complications that may develop is diabetic foot which also pose a significant burden to healthcare sector (1). In Malaysia, the prevalence of diabetic foot ulcers is around to 42% among diabetes patient in Kuala Lumpur (2,3). This condition, resulting from a combination of poor circulation and nerve damage, can lead to ulcers, infections, and even amputations if not managed properly (2). Effective management of diabetic foot is vital in improving health outcomes. To ensure a good health outcome can succeed, patient engagement is one of the critical components in this process.

## The Importance of Patient Engagement

Patient engagement refers to the involvement of patients in managing their health. This concept is really important, especially in chronic disease management, where daily self-care activities play a significant role in preventing complications. Engaged patients are more likely to adhere to treatment plans, make informed decisions, and take proactive steps to manage their health (5).

For diabetic foot management, patient engagement involves regular monitoring of foot health, adherence to prescribed treatments, lifestyle modifications, and timely communication with healthcare providers. When patients are actively engaged, they are more likely to notice early signs of complications, seek prompt medical attention, and follow preventive measures diligently (5).

## Strategies to Enhance Patient Engagement

There are a few strategies that can be used to enhance patient engagement. The strategies are a) provide education and awareness, b) tailor personalized care plans, c) make use of technology, d) have a strong support system, and e) adhere to regular follow-ups.

### a) Provide education and awareness

Providing education and awareness is an initial step towards engaging the patient in their self-care. The patient should be educated about the risks associated with diabetic foot and the importance of regular foot care. For instance, healthcare providers should offer clear, accessible information about how to inspect feet, recognize signs of complications, and understand the impact of blood sugar control on foot health. Inclusivity of the patient in their self-care will be very helpful for the patient to self-aware on their condition (6).

### b) Tailor personalized care plans

Developing individualized care plans that cater to each patient's specific needs and circumstances can enhance their engagement. These plans should consider the patient's lifestyle, preferences, and potential barriers to adherence, ensuring they are specific, relevant, realistic and achievable (7).

### c) Make use of technology

Digital tools and mobile health applications can play a significant role in patient engagement. These technologies can provide reminders for foot inspections, medication adherence, and appointments, as well as offer educational

resources and a platform for tracking health metrics (8,9).

**d) Have a strong support system**

Encouraging the involvement of family members and caregivers can provide additional support and motivation for the patients (6). Support groups, whether in-person or online, can also offer a sense of community and shared experience, which can be empowering for patients (10). Hence, a virtual room is a possible choice for social interaction to take place without physical restriction (9).

**e) Adhere to regular follow-ups**

Continuous communication and follow-up appointments with healthcare providers are helpful to reinforce the importance of foot care, monitor progress, and address any concerns or challenges patients may face. This ongoing interaction can build trust and encourage patients to stay engaged in their care. Indirectly, the patient will be well-informed on their foot condition (11).

**The Role of Healthcare Providers**

Healthcare providers play a crucial role in fostering patient engagement. They must adopt a patient-centered approach, characterized by empathy, active listening, and collaboration. Providers should strive to build a strong patient-provider relationship, where patients feel valued and understood. This relationship is the foundation upon which effective patient engagement is built (12).

Providers should also be proactive in identifying patients at high risk for diabetic foot complications and take preventive measures. This includes regular foot examinations, providing appropriate footwear, and addressing any underlying issues such as poor glycemic control or peripheral neuropathy (13).

**CONCLUSION**

Enhancing patient engagement in managing diabetic foot is a multifaceted approach that requires the combined efforts of patients, healthcare providers, and support systems. By prioritizing education, personalized care, technology, support, and regular follow-ups, we can empower patients to take control of their health and prevent the devastating

complications associated with diabetic foot. Alternative solutions such as a virtual clinic for diabetic foot is one of approaches that should be explored so that patient engagement in foot management can be enhanced. As it is named, the virtual clinic will uphold the technology together with all the suggested strategies earlier and inclusive of both health care providers as well as the patient in their foot care management.

In the fight against diabetes, patient engagement is not just a desirable goal but a necessary one. It is through active and informed participation that patients can achieve better outcomes, improved quality of life, and ultimately, a future free from the debilitating effects of diabetic foot complications.

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