POLICY & PRACTICE

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Kids With Diabetes Cost More

Medical costs for children with diabetes are six times those of other children, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. According to administrative claim data for 50,000 children aged 19 years or younger, 8,226 of whom had diabetes, the average annual medical cost in 2007 for the group with diabetes was $9,061, compared with $1,468 for children without diabetes, researchers reported in Diabetes Care. Children who received insulin treatment had medical costs of $9,333 and children with diabetes who were not getting insulin cost their families and private insurance companies $5,683. The authors attributed higher costs with diabetes to medication expenses, specialist visits, and supplies.

Intensive Education Works

People with diabetes who enrolled in an intensive educational program had significant improvement in long-term blood sugar control, according to researchers at Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore. They said the results are important because much diabetes education has little impact or, if it does, early benefits wear off. "We know that people need information to manage their disease, but having knowledge of the facts is not enough for behavioral change," Felicia Hill-Briggs, Ph.D., the study's lead author, said in a statement. The nine-session program included lessons on how to manage diabetes and problem-solving skills to help people with the disease understand why they are having problems when they do. In the educational program, "we helped people integrate diabetes care into everything else that was going on in their lives," Dr. Hill-Briggs said.

A Checklist for Disaster

The American College of Endocrinology and Lilly Diabetes have created a checklist for people with diabetes to help them prepare for natural disasters. Called "Power of Prevention: Diabetes Disaster Plan," the checklist includes having a written summary of one's illness, a 30-day supply of insulin and other drugs, a cooler, and other supplies and information such as contacts for health care providers. "During the aftermath of a natural disaster or weather emergency, medical care and supplies are often in short supply," said Dr. Todd Frieze of Biloxi, Miss., in a statement on the college's Web site. "Through the 'Power of Prevention: Diabetes Disaster Plan,' we hope that the millions of people with diabetes in this country will avoid potentially life-threatening disruptions in their diabetes care."

Public Citizen: Ban Alli, Xenical

The Food and Drug Administration should immediately ban the weight-loss drug orlistat in its prescription (Xenical) and over-the-counter (Alli) formulations because it can damage the liver and cause acute pancreatitis, according to the advocacy group Public Citizen. The group said it had found in the FDA's adverse reaction files 47 cases of acute pancreatitis and 73 cases of kidney stones associated with Alli and Xenical. In addition, three patients taking orlistat developed acute kidney failure – and one died – because calcium salt crystals formed throughout the organs. "These drugs have the potential to cause significant damage to multiple critical organs, yet they provide meager benefits in reducing weight loss in obese and overweight patients," Dr. Sidney Wolfe, Public Citizen Health Research Group Director, said in a statement.

–Naseem S. Miller

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