

# Making links

**Paul O'Dwyer** reflects on sharing his knowledge of oral health and diabetes at the Diabetes Ireland Health & Wellbeing Exhibition 2018

**In my capacity as group clinical adviser at Dental Care Ireland, I was honoured to be asked to speak at the recent Diabetes Health and Wellbeing Exhibition in Cork. The event took place at the Rochestown Park Hotel on 11 November 2018.**

Since our new charity partnership with Diabetes Ireland, Dental Care Ireland provides information and education around oral health for people living with diabetes, as well as those at risk of developing it.

Organised by Diabetes Ireland, the event was free to attend. A team of experts facilitated information workshops on a range of topics, including my own talk on diabetes and oral health – a new addition to this year's agenda.

There were also free tests available to all, including blood glucose, haemoglobin A1C (measuring the three-month average plasma glucose concentration), blood pressure, weight, height and body mass index (BMI).

Diabetes Ireland is the only national charity in Ireland dedicated to helping people with diabetes, by providing support, education and motivation to everyone affected by diabetes.

It also raises public awareness of diabetes and its symptoms, and funds research into finding a cure for this lifelong condition.

## Recent research

According to Diabetes Ireland, a recent Voluntary Health Insurance (VHI) Healthcare screening project tested 30,000 people for type II diabetes between 2009 and 2013.

The findings, published in *Public Library of Science (PLOS) One*, demonstrated that 17% of participants had abnormal initial fasting blood sugar levels, 1.8% had undiagnosed diabetes and 10% had confirmed prediabetes.

Abnormal blood sugar levels, prediabetes and diabetes were more common in men

than in women, with men two to three times more likely to have abnormal blood sugar levels and undiagnosed diabetes.

The study also found that the risk of having undiagnosed diabetes increased by 89% for every increase in BMI by five. This demonstrates the importance of modifiable lifestyle factors in preventing diabetes.

## Diabetes workshops

With more than 225,000 people estimated to have diabetes, many undiagnosed, the event proved an excellent opportunity for people to learn more, get tested and find out ways to manage the condition.



The workshops organised by Diabetes Ireland were wide-ranging, including topics such as day-to-day coping strategies and updates on diabetes research.

I particularly enjoyed a talk given by Bill Murphy, dietitian at Cork University Hospital. Bill's talk centred on exercise and managing type I diabetes and was most illuminating.

Sometimes, as dentists, we are confined to the four walls of our own surgeries and it is hard to fully comprehend the daily challenges that face patients with diabetes.

It was invaluable to hear first-hand about the experiences of those living with diabetes, and the problems they face.

However, it was reassuring to see the advances of new drug regimen and insulin-pump technology, which have both transformed the management of this condition.

## Diabetes and oral health

In my workshop on oral health and diabetes, I highlighted common areas of concern. For example, patients with diabetes can be more susceptible to gum disease.

Certain medications can cause xerostomia, and prolonged irregular glucose intake may lead to caries, if not actively managed. As well as discussing the risks, the workshop centred on methods of prevention and focused on areas of oral hygiene.

Questions followed the session, with many patients expressing interest in the current thinking on oral health support that exists for patients with diabetes.

As part of the partnership, Dental Care Ireland prepared a dedicated web page and an information leaflet. Guidance for attendees included top tips on brushing, regular attendance to their dentist and a look at dietary habits with some salient advice.

This exhibition provided highly informative and helpful advice, for both clinically informed and novice attendees.

More than 1,600 people attended on the day, despite the wet Sunday afternoon! It is a testament to the volunteers of Diabetes Ireland that there was such a huge turnout and the enthusiasm of the attendees was palpable!

All of the Dental Care Ireland team really looks forward to supporting Diabetes Ireland in the coming year. We appreciate the importance of shining a light on the specific requirements needed to better treat this group of patients. ■

## DENTAL CARE IRELAND

Dental Care Ireland is a new Irish-owned network of established dental practices nationwide. To date, the group employs 200 staff across 13 general and specialist dental practices in Dublin, Meath, Carlow, Mayo, Offaly, Wicklow, Galway and Kilkenny.

For further information, visit [www.dentalcareireland.ie](http://www.dentalcareireland.ie). For advice about oral health and diabetes, visit [diabetes.ie/oralhealth](http://diabetes.ie/oralhealth).



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