Suppose there is a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow for everyone, but not everyone knows about it. Jimmy Morris of Hydro, Okla. now knows about it. Of course, it’s not a literal pot of gold. In fact, what Mr. Morris recently learned about adapting to a life with diabetes may be more valuable than a pot of gold. He learned that diabetes does not sentence a person to lifelong suffering; it just requires a lifestyle change. He was introduced to that new lifestyle through Diabetes Self-management Education (DSME) classes sponsored by TMF Health Quality Institute.

Mr. Morris is one of among 30 million people in the U.S. with diabetes. More than 8 million people don’t know they have it and many more don’t know what to do about it. In addition, 86 million people have prediabetes and 90 percent of them are unaware of their condition, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Diabetes is a common story. Knowing how to live a full and active life with the disease is less common. However, there are efforts being made to reach out to more people with diabetes and lead them to their personal pot of a better life.

Mr. Morris was diagnosed with diabetes earlier this year during a trip to the emergency department at a hospital. He was feeling weak, dizzy and exhausted. He had been feeling that way for months. He could do little without pain and exhaustion. The hospital found his blood glucose level to be 844. The normal level is less than 140.

Two weeks after being discharged from the hospital, Mr. Morris stepped into his first DSME class. He was told that the instruction he would receive about a necessary lifestyle change would make a difference in his life. The lifestyle change would require exercise, good nutrition and self-monitoring of blood sugar levels and other signs of diabetes. It would also require him to stop smoking two packs of cigarettes a day.

Today, Mr. Morris can walk and mow his own lawn without getting tired. He can go fishing again and do things he loves to do. He adheres to the instructions from his DSME classes: he reads food labels to know the contents of what he is eating; he manages portion sizes; he exercises, checks his blood levels and sensitivity in his feet. Mr. Morris has lost 15 pounds and cut back on cigarette smoking to one pack per day, with a goal of quitting all smoking.

Following his lifestyle change, Mr. Morris’ hemoglobin A1c test, which shows his average blood glucose levels, showed a drop to 5.7 percent from 12.4 percent. The American Diabetes Association recommends an A1c level equal to or less than 7 percent for people with diabetes. Persons without diabetes typically have a level of about 5 percent. People with prediabetes have levels ranging from 5.7 percent to 6.4 percent. Doctors look at the A1c level and/or random elevated fasting glucose levels as well as symptoms before diagnosing a patient with diabetes.
“It (DSME class) was a great experience and I learned a lot during that time,” Mr. Morris said. “Everyone with diabetes or a loved one with diabetes should attend this class. It is also a good feeling knowing that there are people willing to take time to teach these classes.”

Mr. Morris attended classes taught by the Southwestern Oklahoma State University College of Pharmacy in Weatherford, Okla. The classes are free and are conducted for two hours once a week for six weeks. The classes are provided under the sponsorship of TMF, the Medicare Quality Innovation Network Quality Improvement Organization, which serves a region including Arkansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, Puerto Rico and Texas. TMF is under contract with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services.

DSME classes are available in communities throughout the region. To find out about the availability of classes in your community, please call 1-800-725-2633.