Students Laud the Benefits of DSME Classes

Jesus Bermea Jr. says he is a stubborn guy and was not optimistic that anything could make his life better as a person with diabetes. He slept a lot, felt tired often, did not eat right nor even check his blood glucose levels regularly. His attitude was that it is pointless.

Now, Mr. Bermea has a new attitude on life with diabetes because of increased knowledge about the disease. He now knows that diabetes is not a death or disability sentence, but a lifestyle change. His perspective was transformed after taking a Diabetes Self-management Education (DSME) class at a senior center. He noticed his friends enjoying the class so he decided to participate after the class facilitator asked him to come join the fun. DSME classes are sponsored by the TMF Quality Innovation Network Quality Improvement Organization (QIN-QIO), under contract with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. The TMF QIN-QIO partners with various community organizations to provide the classes in communities throughout Arkansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, Texas, and the territory of Puerto Rico. Mr. Bermea’s original attitude about diabetes is not uncommon, although he may have been harder to convince than most to take a DSME class. People with diabetes who have taken the classes, repeatedly stress how much they learned about managing the disease and how it has changed their lives.

After joining the class, “they got my attention real quick,” Mr. Bermea said. He said that he found out how much salt is in the soup he regularly ate and how much sugar is in the three soft drinks he consumed each day. Now he drinks one a day. He said he also learned how to talk with his doctor and what kind of questions to ask.

“I’m trying to eat right, exercise, monitor my weight, and check my glucose levels and my feet every day,” he said. “I learned so much from the presentations and the hands-on activities that I’m sharing that with the rest of my family.”

Other students of the DSME classes have expressed similar enlightenment.

Maria E. De La Paz, 68, has diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol. She has always followed her doctor’s instructions on taking her medication, but was not informed about checking her glucose levels daily, exercise and food portion control.

“I used to eat so much, but I learned that eating in smaller portions is still filling,” Ms.
De La Paz said. “I am exercising daily and feel much better. Taking the classes has made me a new person.”

Otila Gonzalez says her health has always been a roller coaster ride. Salt intake control was one of the most important things she learned in the DSME classes. However, she also said that learning the consequences of not controlling diabetes is a big motivator for proper self-management.

Diabetes is the most common cause of blindness, kidney failure and amputations in adults, as well as a leading cause of heart disease and stroke. People with diabetes also spend 2.3 times more on health care costs than others without the disease.

Although Juana Pena, 77, has been suffering from diabetes for 14 years, she was not diagnosed with the disease until five years ago. She had not received thorough instructions on how to manage her disease until now. Information gathered by TMF during previous DSME education projects reveals that the average time between diagnosis of the disease and the patient receiving education on how to manage the disease ranged from nine to 12 years. Debilitating consequences can result during the time period between diagnosis and education.

Before taking a DSME class and learning how to eat right, Ms. Pena said she always felt ill.

“I am now eating healthier and controlling my sugar levels,” Ms. Pena said. “I feel happier every day and have more strength and am not as sleepy.”

Although Lydia Garcia was diagnosed with diabetes 15 years ago she knew nothing about diabetes self-management until her recent DSME class. As a consequence, one night many years ago her blood sugar level dropped to a dangerous level. She was taken to a hospital but her legs never recovered and she is now wheelchair bound. Prior to taking a DSME class, she said she felt weak, sad and cried about her condition.

Now, after taking the diabetes self-management class, she is hopeful and feeling positive changes in her health. She has learned how to eat right, resulting in correct glucose levels and lower blood pressure. She also knows how to take care of and test her feet, which can lose sensitivity and get cut and infected without the patient knowing.

“I learned how to empower myself and especially will ask him (her doctor) my A-1c percentage; not to tell me I’m fine, but give me my results and explain,” she said.

She plans to share her knowledge with others who have diabetes and tell them that they don’t have to die early from the disease.

Connie Sanchez also follows the self-management strategies she learned in a DSME class. She exercises more, counts her calories and eats in recommended portions. Ms. Sanchez also no longer automatically
adds salt to her food before she tastes it, because she now knows the problems too much salt can cause.

She said she can carry on with her life, has a better quality of life and can avoid debilitating consequences by staying in control of her diabetes. She is spreading the word to her family and friends about the important benefits of DSME classes.

To find out more about DSME classes in your community, visit www.DiabetesHealthForLife.org and click on the big blue box “Find Classes in Your Area” or call 1-800-725-2633.