

## Media release

28 July 2010

### **New strategy to prevent young people with diabetes dropping out of health care**

There are around 10,000 young Australians with type 1 diabetes in transition (age 15-25 years) moving between the children's healthcare system and adult care.

Research shows that between 30-40 per cent of young people with type 1 diabetes are 'lost' from specialist care each year when transitioning to adult care and one third need additional mental health support.

Professor Susan Sawyer from the Centre for Adolescent Health says it is a very difficult time for all concerned including parents and health professionals as well as the adolescents themselves. "The toughest job around is parenting adolescents and with the added complication of type 1 diabetes it is important to encourage continual engagement so that young people with diabetes continue to receive the best care available to provide optimum life chances to the individual and to reduce the risk of ongoing complications."

Those aged 16–25 often experience the most trying and difficult issues, have poorer diabetes control than at any other time in their lives and are at higher risk of developing preventable complications including eye, kidney, heart disease and psychosocial problems.

A new strategy has been initiated by Diabetes Australia which aims to engage children with type 1 diabetes and their parents so that they can be better informed and connected to health services and able to manage their diabetes well. Birthday cards will be sent to all young people with diabetes starting at their 12<sup>th</sup> birthday through to their 20<sup>th</sup> birthday and their parents will receive age appropriate transition information to assist with the move from children's healthcare to adult care.

Diabetes Australia Acting CEO Professor Greg Johnson says "It is important to develop innovative and appropriate ways to engage young people and for them to realise why remaining in the healthcare system and diabetes care is essential for their good health."

Dallas Wickenden mother of 12 year old daughter with type 1 diabetes says "Freya is still totally engaged with family life and we are very important in her current diabetes management. As she gets older we can see that she is becoming more independent and we appreciate any help we can get to engage around important issues to keep Freya on track for the best health outcomes possible."

Rebecca O'Brien was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes when she was seven years old. Now, at 31 years of age, Rebecca has severe eye and kidney damage as a result of poorly managed diabetes.

These complications could have been prevented with careful management of blood glucose levels and regular check-ups at the diabetes clinic.

But Rebecca dropped out of the healthcare system in her late teens. She says "I couldn't see the point in attending appointments – I was feeling fine. No one from the hospital called to ask if I was going to come in again, so I didn't bother."

Rebecca's case highlights the importance of ensuring that young people understand their diabetes and the role that their healthcare team has in helping to manage the condition. It is also important for the healthcare team to remain fully engaged with the individual as well. The transition pack is a great idea because it reminds young people to stay in touch with their diabetes team and provides parents with information and help.



**Media enquiries:** Lyn Curtis, 0411019924, [lcurtis@diabetesvic.org.au](mailto:lcurtis@diabetesvic.org.au)  
or Phoebe Bond, Ph: 0411 313 840, [pbond@diabetesvic.org.au](mailto:pbond@diabetesvic.org.au)