American Association of Diabetes Educators Patient Education Video Series

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The American Association of Diabetes Educators has produced high-quality short videocassettes that speak directly to diabetics and their families. The eight-part series begins with an explanation of diabetes. Then it describes and demonstrates ways in which patients can manage their illness using good nutrition, exercise, medication, and a health care plan. The information is accurate, relevant, and is offered in bite-sized chunks suitable for patients dealing with emotional and cognitive aspects of the disease. Patient responsibility is stressed throughout the series.

Much information is presented with obvious places to stop the videos for discussion. The series would be well used in a 4- to 6-week class for new diabetics and their partners. That would allow time for life-style changes and practical questions to arise. The series would also educate and motivate longtime and noncompliant diabetics. “Preventing Long Term Complications of Diabetes” and “Diabetes Foot and Skin Care: In Step” offer especially useful information for that audience.

The videos “Understanding Insulin” and “Injecting Insulin” should be available to every new insulin patient. Too often a nurse speaks a few words of direction and encouragement, then hands the patient a needle and an orange. It would be cost-effective and educational for hospitals and physicians to use these tapes. Unfortunately, most will probably accept less helpful free materials from drug company representatives.

Technically, there is a sharp contrast in quality between earlier and later videos. “Introduction to Diabetes: the Game Plan” and “Diabetes and Exercise: in Training” have a few distracting camera movements that detract from the message. Two of the eight tapes previewed had brief whiteouts of actors. These are minor problems, however. Script quality is high with an interesting blend of informality, instruction, patient reactions, and graphics that reinforce the information.

Most patients shown are middle-aged, and the very old do not appear in the series. This was not a problem for the 74-year-old noncompliant diabetic who previewed the series before this review was written. He and his wife learned a lot from it, he said, after 14 years with diabetes and 5 years using insulin.

In summary, these tapes are too good to miss. Diabetics need this information but the cost is high. Is there a benefactor who can subsidize dissemination? I suggest that you lobby Milner-Fenwick, Inc. and the American Association of Diabetes Educators to lower the price. Pharmacies should add the series to their lending libraries of life-saving information.

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Breaking Silence is a moving video of great sadness and melodrama documenting the existence of the last year (1992) of a small group of cloistered nuns in Parkersburg, West Virginia. Like aging, the video is basically about changes that occur in life as one moves toward the later years. In this case, it is a group of 10 cloistered women who ran an elementary school (the first in the city over 100 years ago) and lived a contemplative life. They simply aged in place, with the exception of the youngest member who was the elected leader (Mother Superior). As Mother Superior her major tasks would be to help the group decide to close the school and move out of the outdated convent, sell the buildings and the property, move the deceased members from one cemetery to another, and find a place for each Sister to live out her remaining days.

The Mother Superior definitely sees herself as a daughter in a role-reversal situation. She speaks of having “nine grandmothers” so this reversal actually skipped a generation because the Sisters are so much older than she. She is by religious election the “Mother” and she is also the “mother” who must now care for her “daughters” in need. (Note: The mother-daughter relationship among many religious orders today has been dropped in favor of a more mature, collegial, woman-to-woman relationship.)

Candid interviews and scenes showing the Sisters talking about the move and the impact this will have on their lives reveal similarities between the Sisters and their female counterparts who must retire from work, leave familiar surroundings after many years of being in one place, and cope with the decision of moving to another location. The strong religious belief system perhaps cushions the blow, but change is still very difficult for these women. Questions of the value of the life lived at DeSales Heights for so many years, the decision to close the convent and school, the need to find a safe and secure place to live away from a group that had become “family” are some of the issues faced by this group of aging nuns.