

# National Standards for Diabetes Self-Management Education

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**D**iabetes self-management education (DSME) is a critical element of care for all people with diabetes and is necessary in order to improve patient outcomes. The National Standards for DSME are designed to define quality diabetes self-management education and to assist diabetes educators in a variety of settings to provide evidence-based education. Because of the dynamic nature of health care and diabetes-related research, these Standards are reviewed and revised approximately every 5 years by key organizations and federal agencies within the diabetes education community.

A Task Force was jointly convened by the American Association of Diabetes Educators and the American Diabetes Association in the summer of 2006. Additional organizations that were represented included the American Dietetic Association, the Veteran's Health Administration, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Indian Health Service, and the American Pharmaceutical Association. Members of the Task Force included a person with diabetes; several health services researchers/behaviorists, registered nurses, and registered dietitians; and a pharmacist.

The Task Force was charged with reviewing the current DSME standards for

their appropriateness, relevance, and scientific basis. The Standards were then reviewed and revised based on the available evidence and expert consensus. The committee convened on 31 March 2006 and 9 September 2006, and the Standards were approved 25 March 2007.

## DEFINITION AND OBJECTIVES

Diabetes self-management education (DSME) is the ongoing process of facilitating the knowledge, skill, and ability necessary for diabetes self-care. This process incorporates the needs, goals, and life experiences of the person with diabetes and is guided by evidence-based standards. The overall objectives of DSME are to support informed decision-making, self-care behaviors, problem-solving and active collaboration with the health care team and to improve clinical outcomes, health status, and quality of life.

**GUIDING PRINCIPLES**—Before the review of the individual Standards, the Task Force identified overriding principles based on existing evidence that would be used to guide the review and revision of the DSME Standards. These are:

1. Diabetes education is effective for improving clinical outcomes and quality of life, at least in the short-term (1–7).
2. DSME has evolved from primarily didactic presentations to more theoretically based empowerment models (3,8).
3. There is no one “best” education program or approach; however, programs incorporating behavioral and psychosocial strategies demonstrate improved outcomes (9–11). Additional studies show that culturally and age-appropriate programs improve outcomes (12–16) and that group education is effective (4,6,7,17,18).
4. Ongoing support is critical to sustain progress made by participants during the DSME program (3,13,19,20).
5. Behavioral goal-setting is an effective strategy to support self-management behaviors (21).

## STANDARDS

### Structure

**Standard 1.** *The DSME entity will have documentation of its organizational structure, mission statement, and goals and will recognize and support quality DSME as an integral component of diabetes care.*

Documentation of the DSME organizational structure, mission statement, and goals can lead to efficient and effective provision of services. In the business literature, case studies and case report investigations on successful management strategies emphasize the importance of clear goals and objectives, defined relationships and roles, and managerial support (22–25). While this concept is relatively new in health care, business and health policy experts and organizations have begun to emphasize written commitments, policies, support, and the importance of outcome variables in quality improvement efforts (22,26–37). The continuous quality improvement literature also stresses the importance of developing policies, procedures, and guidelines (22,26).

Documentation of the organizational structure, mission statement, and goals can lead to efficient and effective provision of DSME. Documentation of an organizational structure that delineates channels

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of communication and represents institutional commitment to the educational entity is critical for success (38–42). According to the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Health Care Organizations (JCAHO) (26), this type of documentation is equally important for small and large health care organizations. Health care and business experts overwhelmingly agree that documentation of the process of providing services is a critical factor in clear communication and provides a solid basis from which to deliver quality diabetes education (22,26,33,35–37). In 2005, JACHO published the *Joint Commission International Standards for Disease or Condition-Specific Care*, which outlines national standards and performance measurements for diabetes and addresses diabetes self-management education as one of seven critical elements (26).

**Standard 2.** *The DSME entity shall appoint an advisory group to promote quality. This group shall include representatives from the health professions, people with diabetes, the community, and other stakeholders.*

Established and new systems (e.g., committees, governing bodies, advisory groups) provide a forum and a mechanism for activities that serve to guide and sustain the DSME entity (30,39–41). Broad participation of organization(s) and community stakeholders, including health professionals, people with diabetes, consumers, and other community interest groups, at the earliest possible moment in the development, ongoing planning, and outcomes evaluation process (22,26,33,35,36,41) can increase knowledge and skills about the local community and enhance collaborations and joint decision-making. The result is a DSME program that is patient-centered, more responsive to consumer-identified needs and the needs to the community, more culturally relevant, and of greater personal interest to consumers (43–50).

**Standard 3.** *The DSME entity will determine the diabetes educational needs of the target population(s) and identify resources necessary to meet these needs.*

Clarifying the target population and determining its self-management educational needs serve to focus resources and maximize health benefits (51–53). The assessment process should identify the educational needs of all individuals with diabetes, not just those who frequently attend clinical appointments (51). DSME is a critical component of diabetes treatment (2,54,55), yet the majority of individuals

with diabetes do not receive any formal diabetes education (56,57). Thus, identification of access issues is an essential part of the assessment process (58). Demographic variables, such as ethnic background, age, formal educational level, reading ability, and barriers to participation in education, must also be considered to maximize the effectiveness of DSME for the target population (13–19,43–47,59–61).

**Standard 4.** *A coordinator will be designated to oversee the planning, implementation, and evaluation of diabetes self-management education. The coordinator will have academic or experiential preparation in chronic disease care and education and in program management.*

The role of the coordinator is essential to ensure that quality diabetes education is delivered through a coordinated and systematic process. As new and creative methods to deliver education are explored, the coordinator plays a pivotal role in ensuring accountability and continuity of the educational process (23,60–62). The individual serving as the coordinator will be most effective if there is familiarity with the lifelong process of managing a chronic disease (e.g., diabetes) and with program management.

### Process

**Standard 5.** *DSME will be provided by one or more instructors. The instructors will have recent educational and experiential preparation in education and diabetes management or will be a certified diabetes educator. The instructor(s) will obtain regular continuing education in the field of diabetes management and education. At least one of the instructors will be a registered nurse, dietitian, or pharmacist. A mechanism must be in place to ensure that the participant's needs are met if those needs are outside the instructors' scope of practice and expertise.*

Diabetes education has traditionally been provided by nurses and dietitians. Nurses have been utilized most often as instructors in the delivery of formal DSME (2,3,5,63–67). With the emergence of medical nutrition therapy (66–70), registered dietitians became an integral part of the diabetes education team. In more recent years, the role of the diabetes educator has expanded to other disciplines, particularly pharmacists (73–79). Reviews comparing the effectiveness of different disciplines for education report mixed results (3,5,6). Generally, the literature favors current practice that utilizes the registered nurse, registered dietitian,

and the registered pharmacist as the key primary instructors for diabetes education and members of the multidisciplinary team responsible for designing the curriculum and assisting in the delivery of DSME (1–7,77). In addition to registered nurses, registered dietitians, and pharmacists, a number of studies reflect the ever-changing and evolving health care environment and include other health professionals (e.g., a physician, behaviorist, exercise physiologist, ophthalmologist, optometrist, podiatrist) (48,80–84) and, more recently, lay health and community workers (85–91) and peers (92) to provide information, behavioral support, and links with the health care system as part of DSME.

Expert consensus supports the need for specialized diabetes and educational training beyond academic preparation for the primary instructors on the diabetes team (64,93–97). Certification as a diabetes educator by the National Certification Board for Diabetes Educators (NCBDE) is one way a health professional can demonstrate mastery of a specific body of knowledge, and this certification has become an accepted credential in the diabetes community (98). An additional credential that indicates specialized training beyond basic preparation is board certification in advanced Diabetes Management (BC-ADM) offered by the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC), which is available for master's prepared nurses, dietitians, and pharmacists (48,84,99).

DSME has been shown to be most effective when delivered by a multidisciplinary team with a comprehensive plan of care (7,31,52,100–102). Within the multidisciplinary team, team members work interdependently, consult with one another, and have shared objectives (7,103,104). The team should have a collective combination of expertise in the clinical care of diabetes, medical nutrition therapy, educational methodologies, teaching strategies, and the psychosocial and behavioral aspects of diabetes self-management. A referral mechanism should be in place to ensure that the individual with diabetes receives education from those with appropriate training and credentials. It is essential in this collaborative and integrated team approach that individuals with diabetes are viewed as leaders of their team and assume an active role in designing their educational experience (7,20,31,100–102,104).

**Standard 6.** *A written curriculum reflecting current evidence and practice guidelines,*

with criteria for evaluating outcomes, will serve as the framework for the DSME entity. Assessed needs of the individual with pre-diabetes and diabetes will determine which of the content areas listed below are to be provided:

- Describing the *diabetes disease process and treatment options*
- Incorporating *nutritional management* into lifestyle
- Incorporating *physical activity* into lifestyle
- Using *medication(s)* safely and for maximum therapeutic effectiveness
- *Monitoring blood glucose* and other parameters and interpreting and using the results for self-management decision making
- Preventing, detecting, and treating *acute complications*
- Preventing detecting, and treating *chronic complications*
- Developing personal strategies to address psychosocial issues and concerns
- Developing personal strategies to promote health and behavior change

People with diabetes and their families and caregivers have a great deal to learn in order to become effective self-managers of their diabetes. A core group of topics are commonly part of the curriculum taught in comprehensive programs that have demonstrated successful outcomes (1,2,3,6,105–109). The curriculum, a coordinated set of courses and educational experiences, includes learning outcomes and effective teaching strategies (110–112). The curriculum is dynamic and needs to reflect current evidence and practice guidelines (112–117). Current educational research reflects the importance of emphasizing practical, problem-solving skills, collaborative care, psychosocial issues, behavior change, and strategies to sustain self-management efforts (31,39,42,48,98,118–122).

The content areas delineated above provide instructors with an outline for developing this curriculum. It is important that the content be tailored to match each individual's needs and adapted as necessary for age, type of diabetes (including pre-diabetes and pregnancy), cultural influences, health literacy, and other comorbidities (123,124). The content areas are designed to be applicable in all settings and represent topics that can be developed in basic, intermediate, and advanced levels. Approaches to education that are interactive

and patient-centered have been shown to be effective (83,119,121,122,125–127).

These content areas are presented in behavioral terms and thereby exemplify the importance of action-oriented, behavioral goals and objectives (13,21,55,121–123,128,129). Creative, patient-centered experience-based delivery methods are effective for supporting informed decision-making and behavior change and go beyond the acquisition of knowledge.

**Standard 7.** *An individual assessment and education plan will be developed collaboratively by the participant and instructor(s) to direct the selection of appropriate educational interventions and self-management support strategies. This assessment and education plan and the intervention and outcomes will be documented in the education record.*

Multiple studies indicate the importance of individualizing education based on the assessment (1,56,68,131–135). The assessment includes information about the individual's relevant medical history, age, cultural influences, health beliefs and attitudes, diabetes knowledge, self-management skills and behaviors, readiness to learn, health literacy level, physical limitations, family support, and financial status (10–17,19,131,136–138). The majority of these studies support the importance of attitudes and health beliefs in diabetes care outcomes (1,68,134,135,138,139).

In addition, functional health literacy (FHL) level can affect patients' self-management, communication with clinicians, and diabetes outcomes (140,141). Simple tools exist for measuring FHL as part of an overall assessment process (142–144).

Many people with diabetes experience problems due to medication costs, and asking patients about their ability to afford treatment is important (144). Comorbid chronic illness (e.g., depression and chronic pain) as well as more general psychosocial problems can pose significant barriers to diabetes self-management (104,146–151); considering these issues in the assessment may lead to more effective planning (149–151).

Periodic reassessment determines attainment of the educational objectives or the need for additional and creative interventions and future reassessment (7,97,100,152). A variety of assessment modalities, including telephone follow-up and other information technologies (e.g., Web-based, automated phone

calls), may augment face-to-face assessments (97,99).

While there is little direct evidence on the impact of documentation on patient outcomes, it is required to receive payment for services. In addition, documentation of patient encounters guides the educational process, provides evidence of communication among instructional staff, may prevent duplication of services, and provides information on adherence to guidelines (37,64,100,131,153). Providing information to other members of the patient's health care team through documentation of educational objectives and personal behavioral goals increases the likelihood that all of the members will address these issues with the patient (37,98,153).

The use of evidence-based performance and outcome measures has been adopted by organizations and initiatives such as the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA), the Diabetes Quality Improvement Project (DQIP), the Health Plan Employer Data and Information Set (HEDIS), the Veterans Administration Health System, and JCAHO (26,154).

Research suggests that the development of standardized procedures for documentation, training health professionals to document appropriately, and the use of structured standardized forms based on current practice guidelines can improve documentation and may ultimately improve quality of care (100,153–155).

**Standard 8.** *A personalized follow-up plan for ongoing self management support will be developed collaboratively by the participant and instructor(s). The patient's outcomes and goals and the plan for ongoing self management support will be communicated to the referring provider.*

While DSME is necessary, it is not sufficient for patients to sustain a lifetime of diabetes self-care (55). Initial improvements in metabolic and other outcomes diminish after ~6 months (3). To sustain behavior at the level of self-management needed to effectively manage diabetes, most patients need ongoing diabetes self-management support (DSMS).

DSMS is defined as activities to assist the individual with diabetes to implement and sustain the ongoing behaviors needed to manage their illness. The type of support provided can include behavioral, educational, psychosocial, or clinical (13,121–123).

A variety of strategies are available for providing DSMS both within and

outside the DSME entity. Some patients benefit from working with a nurse case manager (7,20,98,157). Case management for DSMS can include reminders about needed follow-up care and tests, medication management, education, behavioral goal-setting, and psychosocial support/ connection to community resources.

The effectiveness of providing DSMS through disease-management programs, trained peers and health community workers, community-based programs, use of technology, ongoing education and support groups, and medical nutrition therapy has also been established (7,13,89–92,101,121–123,158–159).

While the primary responsibility for diabetes education belongs to the DSME entity, patients benefit by receiving reinforcement of content and behavioral goals from their entire health care team (100). Additionally, many patients receive DSMS through their provider. Thus, communication is essential to ensure that patients receive the support they need.

### Outcomes

**Standard 9.** *The DSME entity will measure attainment of patient-defined goals and patient outcomes at regular intervals using appropriate measurement techniques to evaluate the effectiveness of the educational intervention.*

In addition to program-defined goals and objectives (e.g., learning goals, metabolic, and other health outcomes), the DSME entity needs to assess each patient's personal self-management goals and his/her progress toward those personal goals. The AADE7 self-care behaviors provide a useful framework for assessment and documentation. Diabetes self-management behaviors include physical activity, healthy eating, medication taking, monitoring blood glucose, diabetes self-care related problem solving, reducing risks of acute and chronic complications, and psychosocial aspects of living with diabetes (112,160). Assessments of patient outcomes should occur at appropriate intervals. The interval depends on the outcome itself and the timeframe provided within the selected goals. For some areas, the indicators, measures, and timeframes may be based on guidelines from professional organizations or government agencies. In addition to assessing progress toward personal behavioral goals, a plan needs to be in place to communicate personal goals and progress to other team members.

The AADE Outcome Standards for Diabetes Education specify self-management behavior as the key outcome (112,160). Knowledge is an outcome to the degree that it is actionable (i.e., knowledge that can be translated into self-management behavior). In turn, effective self-management is one (but not the only) contributor to longer-term, higher-order outcomes such as clinical status (e.g., control of glycemia, blood pressure, and cholesterol), health status (e.g., avoidance of complications), and subjective quality of life. Thus, patient self-management behaviors are at the core of the outcomes evaluation.

**Standard 10.** *The DSME entity will measure the effectiveness of the education process and determine opportunities for improvement using a written continuous quality improvement plan that describes and documents a systematic review of the entities' process and outcome data.*

Diabetes education must be responsive to advances in knowledge, treatment strategies, educational strategies, psychosocial interventions, and the changing health care environment. Continuous quality improvement (CQI) is an iterative, planned process (161) that leads to improvement in the delivery of patient education (162). The CQI plan should define quality based on and consistent with the organization's mission, vision, and strategic plan and include identifying and prioritizing improvement opportunities (163). Once improvement projects are identified and selected, the plan should incorporate timelines and important milestones including data collection, analysis, and presentation of results (163). Outcome measures indicate the result of a process (i.e., whether changes are actually leading to improvement), while process measures provide information about what caused those results (163–164). Process measures are often targeted to those processes that typically impact the most important outcomes. Measuring both process and outcomes helps to ensure that change is successful without causing additional problems in the system (164).

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