Managing Type 1 Diabetes in College: A Thematic Analysis of Online Narratives Posted on YouTube

Authors : Ekaterina Malova

Abstract : Type 1 diabetes (T1D) is a chronic illness requiring immense lifestyle changes to reduce the chance of life-threatening complications. Moving to a college may be the first time for a young adult with T1D to take responsibility for all the aspects of their diabetes care. In addition, people with T1D constantly face stigmatization and discrimination as a result of their health condition, which puts additional pressure on young adults with T1D. Hence, omissions in diabetes self-care often occur during the time of transition to college when both the social and physical environment of young adults changes drastically and contribute to the fact that emerging young adults remain one of the age groups with the highest hemoglobin levels and poorest diabetes control. However, despite potential severe health risks caused by a lack of proper diabetes self-care, little is known about the experiences of emerging adults embarking on a higher education journey as this population. Thus, young adults with type 1 diabetes are a 'forgotten group,' meaning that their experiences are rarely addressed by researchers. Given that self-disclosure and information-seeking can be challenging for individuals with stigmatized illnesses, online platforms like YouTube have become a popular medium of self-disclosure and information-seeking for people living with T1D. Thus, this study aims to provide an analysis of experiences that college students with T1D choose to share with the general public online and explore the nature of information being communicated by college students with T1D to the online community in personal narratives posted on YouTube. A systematic approach was used to retrieve a video sample by searching YouTube with keywords 'type 1 diabetes' and 'college,' with results ordered by relevance. A total of 18 videos were saved. Video lengths ranged from 2 to 28 minutes. The data were coded using NVivo. Video transcripts were coded and analyzed utilizing the thematic analysis method. Three key themes emerged from thematic analysis: 1) Advice, 2) Personal experience, and 3) Things I wish everyone knew about T1D. In addition, Theme 1 was divided into subtopics to differentiate between the most common types of advice: 1) Overcoming stigma and b) Seeking social support. The identified themes indicate that two groups of the population can potentially benefit from watching students' video testimonies: 1) lay public and 2) other students with T1D. Given that students in the videos reported a lack of T1D education in the lay public, such video narratives can serve important educational purposes and reduce health stigma, while perceived similarity and identification with students in the videos may facilitate the transition of health information to other individuals with T1D and positively affect their diabetes routine. Thus, online video narratives can potentially serve both educational and persuasive purposes, empowering students with T1D to stay in control of T1D while succeeding academically.

Keywords : type 1 diabetes, college students, health communication, transition period
Conference Title : ICHC 2021 : International Conference on Health Communications
Conference Location : Dubai, United Arab Emirates
Conference Dates : August 16-17, 2021