

# Pennsylvania to Launch Diabetes Tracking Initiative

BY JENNIFER LUBELL  
Associate Editor, Practice Trends

Efforts are underway in Pennsylvania to set up physician tracking systems, self-management programs, and centers to help patients better manage diabetes.

"In Pennsylvania there's a significant lack of knowledge regarding diabetes health," said Dr. Andrew Behnke, an endocrinologist and a member of the Pennsylvania Medical Society. While the society isn't specifically involved in this initiative, "we're supportive of any effort to educate physicians and patients and help patients achieve their health goals."

The University of Pittsburgh Diabetes Institute (UPDI) will spearhead these efforts in partnership with communities throughout western Pennsylvania with an \$8 million grant from the Department of Defense.

"Diabetes has emerged as one of the most serious health problems in Pennsylvania, particularly in rural areas," Rep. John Murtha (D-Pa.) said in announcing the initiative. Overall, 8% of Pennsylvanians (1.1 million people [720,500 diagnosed and 379,500 undiagnosed]) have diabetes, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Diabetes accounts for \$7.7 billion in total health care costs and 11,500 deaths every year in Pennsylvania.

The expectation is the programs will serve as models that can be replicated throughout the United States and applied to the military, Rep. Murtha said. A similar ini-

tiative is underway in New York City, where clinical laboratories are sending the results of all hemoglobin A<sub>1c</sub> tests to the city's health department, with a goal of providing information to physicians on their patients with diabetes—and informing those patients whose results indicate poor glycemic control.

Some of the DOD funds will build upon the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center's efforts to track diabetes information. Diabetes tracking systems and programs will be offered through Memorial Medical Center, Uniontown Hospital, Highlands Hospital, and Indiana (Pa.) Regional Medical Center. Specifically, the programs will monitor hemoglobin A<sub>1c</sub> tests, blood pressure, cholesterol levels, and foot and eye exams, said Linda Siminerio, Ph.D., director of the UPDI. Project leaders hope to use the data to coordinate intervention programs, where they would work with doctors to get patients better care.

As part of the tracking initiative, Delphi Health Systems Inc. will partner with UPDI and the community hospitals by providing diabetes management software to be used at the point of care.

The project has been working with leaders of hospitals in outlying communities that have their own physician practices, Dr. Siminerio said in an interview. "We've been asking those leaders who have done needs assessments in their communities what their physicians are interested in."



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In another partnership, the Diabetes Institute and the Conemaugh Health System's Memorial Medical Center will establish a Diabetes Wellness Center at Memorial's downtown campus in Johnstown. The Center plans comprehensive screening for the prevention of diabetes complications such as retinopathy, nephropathy, neuropathy, cardiovascular disease, and lower-extremity arterial disease.

Nationally, diabetes is the fifth leading cause of death, according to the American Diabetes Association. One out of every 10 health care dollars is spent on diabetes and its complications.

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