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UK lagging behind Europe for use of insulin pumps

The fact that the NHS is not providing insulin pumps to enough people with type 1 diabetes – compared to much higher access rates in other European nations – may be exposing them to greater risk of serious health complications, according to two diabetes charities.

Diabetes UK and JDRF expressed concerns as the UK's first ever audit of insulin pump use, published today, revealed that just seven per cent of the estimated 247,500 UK people with Type 1 diabetes use a pump.

These continually infuse insulin into the layer of tissue just beneath the skin and so help control blood glucose levels more tightly. Better blood glucose control is known to reduce the risk of long-term complications such as blindness, amputation, kidney failure and stroke. The pumps also offer a more practical alternative to multiple daily injections and help avoid hypos, which are when a person's blood glucose level falls too low.

Usage in the UK is thought to have gone up over the last five years. But the report highlights that the seven per cent figure is still much lower than in countries such as Germany and Norway, where over 15 per cent of those with Type 1 diabetes use a pump. In the US, use of insulin pumps is even more widespread, with some 40 per cent of people with Type 1 having one.

The picture in the UK is slightly better for children, with 19 per cent of under-18s with Type 1 using a pump, but this is still much lower than comparable European countries.

The report was published today by Ian Gallen, Fellow of the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), and supported by the Association of British Clinical Diabetologists as well as the charities Diabetes UK and JDRF.

Diabetes UK and JDRF are both concerned that some people with Type 1 diabetes who would gain maximum benefit are continuing to be denied access to a pump. The report suggests the UK's poor performance is linked to the low number of healthcare professionals qualified to train people with Type 1 diabetes to use a pump, with the lack of diabetes specialist nurses (DSNs) a particular problem.

The two charities are calling on the NHS to ensure that every child with Type 1 diabetes is able to access specialist paediatric teams and that adult diabetes teams are commissioned to ensure access to a DSN who is experienced in pump management, which would deliver a big increase in pump usage in the UK.

Barbara Young, Chief Executive for Diabetes UK, said: "While not everyone with Type 1 diabetes wants a pump, it is important that those who would benefit and meet NICE guidance are able to access one, as pumps help some people to maintain a better level of blood glucose control than is possible through injecting insulin.

"This means that, long term, having a pump can reduce risk of complications such as amputation and blindness, can significantly improve quality of life and play a real role in helping people to manage their own condition, which in turn can reduce the number of people with Type 1 diabetes who die before their time.

“This new report suggests that getting more healthcare professionals qualified to train people with Type 1 diabetes to use a pump is big part of the solution. We now need the NHS to make this happen, as part of its commitment to ensuring everyone with diabetes has the best possible chance of a long and healthy life.”

Karen Addington, Chief Executive of JDRF, said: “Access to pumps for those living with Type 1 has increased over the last five years, but at a glacial pace – from two per cent to seven per cent. JDRF has long pushed the message that increased investment in research to cure, treat and prevent Type 1 diabetes and its complications is vital. But furthermore, this report highlights the crucial importance of actual access to the treatments that come from this research. After all, insulin pumps were first endorsed for UK patients by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) ten years ago.”

Publisher of the report Ian Gallen said: “Whilst the national picture is improving, we are still a good way from where we should be with pump treatment. There are people who are having problems managing their diabetes who do not have the option of an insulin pump offered to them in a timely way, because of insufficient specialist support services. The commissioners of diabetes services must study our audit so they can ensure they commission appropriate specialist diabetes services, meaning that people can quickly move to pump treatment when needed.”

This was the first comprehensive audit of insulin pump access in the UK, involving the participation of 97 per cent of hospital trusts that provide insulin pump services.

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For further media information contact Richard Evans in the Diabetes UK media office on 020 7424 1152 or contact Michael Connellan at the JDRF press office on 07900 923224. If you are interested in case studies, contact Michael.

For urgent out of hours media enquiries only please call **07711 176 028**.

Notes to Editors:

- Pumps are about the size of an average mobile phone. They run on batteries and have safety features to warn you if the power is running low, or if you are running out of insulin.
- Pumps can be safely and discretely attached in lots of different ways, such as to a belt or the waist of trousers. They can also be placed in a small bag that is attached to the arm or leg, if the insulin is being administered via these sites.
- Running from the pump is an infusion set, which is a thin plastic tube with either a small needle or soft plastic cannula (a very thin and flexible plastic tube) at the other end. The needle or cannula is inserted under the skin and can usually be left in for two to three days.
- For the full NICE guidance on insulin pumps, please see the NICE website at www.nice.nhs.uk
- Type 1 diabetes is a chronic, life-threatening condition which reduces life expectancy by up to 20 years. It is caused by a problem with the immune system and cannot be prevented by adopting a healthy diet, exercising regularly, or living a healthy lifestyle. People with type 1 diabetes rely on multiple insulin injections or pump infusions every day just to stay alive.

About JDRF

JDRF exists to cure, treat and prevent type 1 diabetes, and is the world's leading charitable funder of type 1 diabetes research. At a global level JDRF volunteers and staff have been responsible for raising over £1 billion to support type 1 diabetes research since the charity's inception.

www.jdrf.org.uk

About Diabetes UK

Diabetes UK is the leading UK charity that cares for, connects with and campaigns on behalf of all people affected by and at risk of diabetes. For more information on all aspects of diabetes and access to Diabetes UK activities and services, visit www.diabetes.org.uk