

# Experiences in a support group of women with type 1 diabetes in pregnancy

Sarah Banting<sup>1</sup>, Meredith Temple-Smith<sup>2</sup>, Catharine McNamara<sup>3,4</sup>, Alexis Shub<sup>1,3</sup>  
<sup>1</sup>Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, The University of Melbourne, <sup>2</sup>Department of General Practice, The University of Melbourne, <sup>3</sup>Perinatal Department, The Mercy Hospital for Women, Heidelberg, <sup>4</sup>School of Nursing and Midwifery, Deakin University

## BACKGROUND

- ~0.1-0.2% of all pregnancies are affected by type 1 diabetes mellitus (T1DM)<sup>(1, 2)</sup>.
- Women with T1DM feel pressure during their pregnancy due to the increased risk of complications and loneliness in living this experience<sup>(3)</sup>.
- The Mercy Hospital implemented a support group for pregnant women with T1DM that runs in conjunction with the diabetes antenatal clinic in 2017.
  - Dynamic and casual setting
  - Private room for participants and diabetes educator
  - Informal structure to discussions
  - Participation is voluntary

## AIM

To explore the impact of a support group on the women's wellbeing throughout their pregnancy

## METHODS

- A descriptive exploratory study of patients engaged in the diabetes support group at The Mercy Hospital for Women.
- A purposive sample of 6 women of varied age attending the antenatal support group at the Mercy Hospital was recruited.
- Women were asked a series of demographic questions and completed a semi structured interview that was digitally recorded.
- Codes were assigned to transcribed interviews using a qualitative research software program, N-Vivo. Coding was discussed with the research team to achieve consensus on common themes.
- Ethics approval was granted by Mercy Health Human Research Ethics Committee.

## RESULTS & DISCUSSION

**THEME 1:**  
Daily life with T1DM prior to pregnancy

"It takes part in every part of life... So it's quite consuming"

**THEME 2:**  
Perceptions of pregnancy with T1DM

- Expectations
- Isolation

**Expectations**  
"I had expectations that it would probably be more difficult than other people experience pregnancy so I kind of was bracing myself for the fact that I thought I would have had more admissions."

**Isolation**  
"There's no one where I'm from that is diabetic that has a baby. So I felt alone."

**Isolation**  
"I didn't really know other people with type 1."

**THEME 3:**  
Diabetes control in pregnancy

"I won't say depressing because that's a strong word... but it can be pretty controlling."

"It's been a little bit more full on... I find it's not too hard but it's very complicated. Every day is different."

**THEME 4:**  
Perceptions of support group

- Group setting
- Shared experience

**Group setting**  
"You kind of feel a little bit more special than the other people because you get your own room and sometimes it feels like you guys are the only people in the hospital. It's a little bit of extra care."

**Shared experience**  
"It's eased my guilt and lowered my expectations of myself because I realise that these are struggles that everyone goes through, it's common, it's not me doing something wrong, that's just the nature of diabetes."

"I suppose it gave me that little bit more motivation to make sure I came [to my medical appointments] every week."

- The practicalities of living with type 1 diabetes impacts patients' everyday lifestyle.
- Women highlighted that it can be difficult to talk to people without type 1 diabetes as the intricacies of the condition require significant knowledge or extensive explanations.
- Women consistently spoke of appreciating the social support in the group and feeling less isolated through participation.
- We are not aware of other support groups for type 1 diabetes embedded in the antenatal clinical setting.

## CONCLUSIONS

- **The support group for pregnant women with type 1 diabetes consumed no additional resources, and was well received by the participants and clinicians.**
- **The support group allowed for bonding over a shared experience. Some were initially hesitant to participate, however the private space and casual setting of the group was well perceived.**
- **The addition of support groups to multidisciplinary care may improve support and the experience of pregnancy for women with T1DM.**

## REFERENCES

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