

A new model of diabetes care

This review proposes a new paradigm for diabetes care that will help to ensure equitable access to patient support programmes in South Africa.



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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

You will learn:

- To raise the profile and need for equitable access to quality diabetes care
- Given that 97% of the South African population has a mobile phone, this free telecoaching initiative should be promoted to all patients by responsible clinicians
- The legal framework and protection of personal data built into the programme reflect an ethical approach to patient support programmes.

Issue

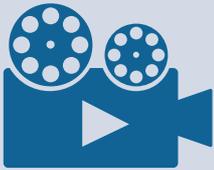
What is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the interaction between

clinicians and patients with diabetes? What specific problems are occurring?

Vulnerable diabetic patients are even more vulnerable

Fear and social distancing are making vulnerable patients even more vulnerable. Patients are avoiding physical healthcare interactions, doctors' rooms, laboratories

and even casualty departments, while doctors are themselves being asked to avoid direct patient contact, unless absolutely necessary, and only to see acute patients.



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You, as a practitioner, need to find new ways of reaching and interacting with patients

Where does this leave the chronic care of diabetes patients? They are scared and isolated. Poor glycaemic control is a major risk factor for a coronavirus poor outcome. You, as a practitioner, need to find new ways of reaching and interacting with patients.^{1,2}

Patients are currently experiencing a worsening of anxiety and depression, if they already have these clinical manifestations. They are also more likely to experience a deterioration in blood glucose control due to competing demands for their time and resources. Because of lockdown constraints, they may have limited access to the help they need to get their condition under control. They may fail to intensify their medication timeously due to lack of data-enabled consultations with you, the practitioner.

Potentially, they could run out of medications due to challenges in obtaining repeat scripts or collecting monthly medication refills at a pharmacy. They

may be monitoring their diabetes less well, and not just their diabetes, but also related complications and comorbidities. They might experience delays in seeking urgent care, even for conditions as serious as myocardial infarctions and strokes. Overall there's an increased risk of poorer coronavirus outcomes related to poor glycaemic control. Table 1 summarises the constraints on patients during this epidemic.

Table 1. Constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic on patient care

- Limited access to care
- Failed intensification of therapy
- Poor monitoring of risk factors
- Reduced in-person consultations
- No data for decision-making
- Inadequate medication adherence and persistence

Practically delivering healthcare to diabetic patients

Coronavirus, and the social distancing and self-isolation consequent thereon, have resulted in reduced in-person visits to doctors, and reduced laboratory monitoring of HbA_{1c}s and renal function, resulting in a lack of clinically important data for decision-making. There is reduced physical monitoring too of blood pressure and weight, and fewer foot and eye examinations. There are lapsed scripts, with consequent challenges to medication

adherence and persistence.

Health insurers have also struggled to overcome the new challenges they face during this time. They have made payment for teleconsultations an option, and have even hosted platforms through which you can provide these teleconsultations. They have also motivated and encouraged the use of courier pharmacies to keep vulnerable patients out of harm's way and to improve adherence to their medication.¹

The paradigm change in chronic care – the role of telecoaching

The way medicine is practised will never be the same again. The management of many chronic conditions is likely to shift to telemedicine, interspersed with fewer in-person visits, and only when required. Guidepost is a standalone, independent

company with deep clinical expertise offering industry-leading diabetes patient support via a telemedicine platform. Guidepost delivers services to patients with diabetes on behalf of insulin companies, health insurers and life insurers.

What are the essential elements of successful patient support programmes

What does Guidepost do? As a patient support programme, it recognises that diabetes is a complex condition requiring 95% of the work to be done by patients themselves. There are too few diabetes educators to reach all patients who need them in all parts of the country.

Guidepost has exploited the fact that less than 3% of our population does not have a cell phone. They have therefore turned the cell phone into the 'disruptive' technology that can bring healthcare to people rather than the other way around.

Guidepost uses a custom-built software

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Hearing a kind and reassuring voice will be an elixir in times of despair and isolation caused by virus-imposed social distancing and quarantining

platform and processes to connect highly trained and qualified coaches, both nurses and dieticians with years of experience in diabetes care, to patients all over the country. By creating a meaningful therapeutic relationship with a coach, your patient begins to understand the complexity of their condition, while learning the skills required to effectively self-manage, thereby improving their quality of life and their clinical outcomes.

Patients embark on a series of data-driven telephonic coaching sessions in a motivational interviewing style

to maximise their understanding and engagement. Coaching sessions are delivered in the patient's mother tongue as far as possible, and in a manner cognisant of their culture, beliefs and finances.

Experienced Guidepost coaches work with patients to execute the clinician's existing treatment plan. This intervention improves outcomes through structured diabetes self-management education (the knowing) and self-management support (the doing), as recommended by the Society for Endocrinology, Metabolism and Diabetes of South Africa (SEMDSA).

What can patient support programmes achieve?

What has Guidepost achieved? Guidepost has managed over 15 000 patients and delivered over 100 000 consultations with an average 4.9 out of 5 consult rating. Real-world data from this programme

consistently demonstrate significant improvements in blood glucose and metabolic control, along with a material reduction in unnecessary hospitalisations (Figures 1 and 2).

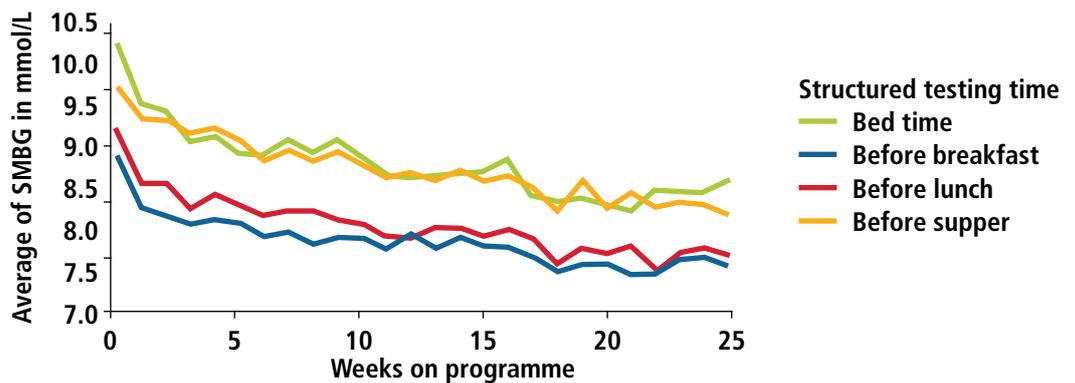


Figure 1. Trend in average pre-meal and bedtime blood glucose levels by time on the programme

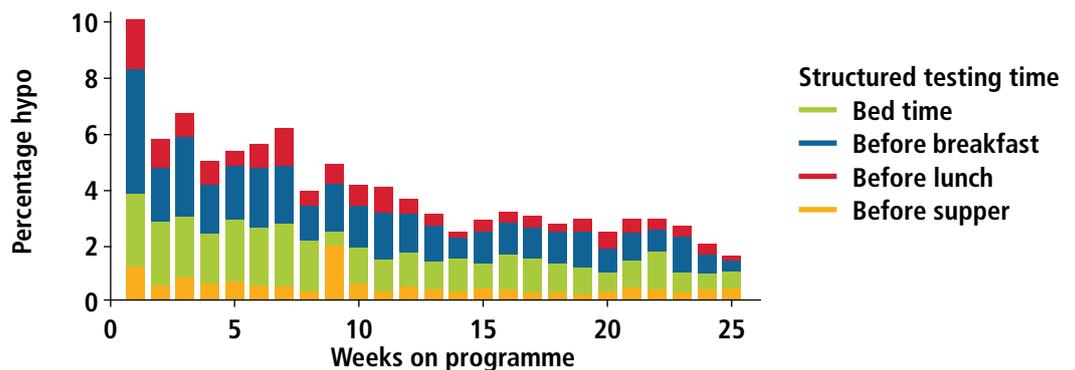


Figure 2. Percentage of hypoglycaemic readings by time of day across the duration of the programme

What solution does telemedicine offer in South Africa?

Telemedicine and the use of the Guidepost platform allow for scalable, high-quality healthcare to be delivered immediately. It allows us not just to contact, but to connect in a meaningful way with hard-to-reach patients, overcoming language, geographical and physical distancing barriers.

Telemedicine also increases opportunities

for more frequent patient engagement. For an anxious and sick patient, the ability to connect via the hotline to a caring and competent healthcare professional is priceless. Hearing a kind and reassuring voice will be an elixir in times of despair and isolation caused by virus-imposed social distancing and quarantining.

Disclaimer

Professor David Segal is Medical Director of Guidepost

What are the benefits for patients?

The Guidepost and MyStar Care Programme and telemedicine bring healthcare to where patients are. It supports and enables self-isolation for patients' own safety. It obviates the need to travel. It increases the frequency of patient contact. It also supplies education and support in their

mother tongue, but, ultimately, Guidepost helps patients to believe that diabetes is manageable and that they are the ones who can manage it. It equips them with the tools, knowledge, support and ability to manage their diabetes.

What are the benefits for healthcare practitioners?

Guidepost helps patients to execute your treatment plan, and will help you to manage them between their regular scheduled visits. When they cannot get to you, your patients are supported to initiate insulin,

and obtain guidance on insulin dose optimisation and nutrition to achieve their glycaemic targets. You will be supplied with frequent, detailed reports that help you to see the progress they are making.

What are the benefits for health insurers?

Patients managed on the Guidepost platform have reduced hospitalisation costs and costs related to long-term

complications that can be delayed or prevented through improved blood glucose control.

What is the legal framework of telemedicine in South Africa?

The global and local uptake of telemedicine services has been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. On 26 March 2020, the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) gave the green light to

practitioners to practice telemedicine during the pandemic, but even prior to this, the Guidepost platform was fully compliant with data protection and scope of practice legislation.

How can you help your patients engage with Guidepost?

Please enquire about signing your practice up to the MyStar Care Diabetes Patient Support Programme so that your patients can access Guidepost services. This is a free service offered by Sanofi to patients on a Sanofi insulin.

Guidepost can even do virtual face-to-face visits for insulin initiation with patients. Those who need additional support will have access to the full Guidepost telecoaching programme and hotline.

There are few global telemedicine companies with the clinical, technological,

legal and compliance framework to deliver telemedicine and Guidepost is one of them. Guidepost has the proven capability to connect a competent healthcare professional with a person in need. The underlying clinical framework is based on the principles of patient-centredness, shared decision-making, the best evidence-based practices, education and support. The model provides a scalable solution that can have an immediate and positive effect on your practice and your patients.

References

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