New group offers help to diabetics

Campus organization meetings help students adapt to disease

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Marni Crabtree had no idea she had diabetes until she fell asleep while taking a test three years ago and was subsequently diagnosed with the disease.

Fatigue is one of the more common symptoms of diabetes, said Ann Earl, a registered nurse and certified diabetes educator with the Central Ohio Diabetes Association.

Since being diagnosed as a diabetic, Crabtree, an education major from Selina, has been attending a diabetic support group in Dublin.

She decided she wanted to start a support group on campus because some of the concerns of students are different from other diabetics.

Dennis Doody, a doctor at the Student Health Center, said one of the bigger issues for students is dealing with peer pressure in avoiding alcohol. He recommends that diabetics avoid all alcohol because it interferes with their metabolism.

In addition, he said students need to adjust to eating on their own, dealing with dorm food in some cases, and remembering to take their insulin on schedule.

"Psychologically, it's kind of hard," Crabtree said. "You're special, but yet you don't want to be treated special, but yet you know you have to be to make sure you can make it through."

The Central Ohio Diabetes Association helped to organize the group. Crabtree, with the help of the association and Doody, sent out about 25 surveys to diabetic students to find out if there was an interest in a support group and what they were looking for in the group.

The results of the survey indicated that in addition to diet questions, students would like to know more about dealing with stress, test anxiety, exercise, insurance issues, legal rights and the importance of a good doctor/patient relationship, Earl said.

Student health insurance will not cover diabetics because the disease statistically shortens their lives. Diabetes also has the potential to cause many other diseases because it weakens the immune system, Doody said.

Crabtree said she would like the format of the group to be primarily a discussion group with the possibility of bringing in speakers.

Some of the symptoms of diabetes include constant urination, constant thirst, unusual hunger accompanied by weight loss, irritability, fatigue, nausea and/or vomiting and an infection that may be slow to heal.

Earl said that sometimes none of these symptoms will be present or only one may occur. The Central Ohio Diabetes Association offers free blood tests for those who suspect they may have diabetes.

Some people may be predisposed to diabetes as well, she said. Those with a family history of diabetes, who are overweight, or are over 40 are more likely to get it.

The most common form of diabetes, diabetes mellitus, occurs when the body is unable to obtain or use insulin. Insulin helps the body to metabolize glucose.

The insulin level in most diabetics is higher than normal, but the hormone's usefulness is impaired because of insulin antagonists or tissue resistance.

There is no known cure for diabetes, but it can be controlled in most cases with a proper diet, sufficient exercise, drugs and restriction of carbohydrates and sweets.

The Central Ohio Diabetes Association sponsors eight support groups throughout the city. The association trains volunteer facilitators for its groups. A training session lasts eight hours and consists of learning about the group process, communication skills and the facilitator's limits as a volunteer so that they know when to refer someone to a professional, Earl said.

The first meeting will be Feb. 25 at 7:30 p.m. in Room 074 in the Wilco Student Health Center. The group will meet formally on the third Thursday of each month. Crabtree would also like the group to plan social activities together to offer alternatives to the bars.

Crabtree and Tom Young, a freshman from Waterford, will facilitate the group, she said.