

Younger S'pore residents less informed about diabetes: Study

This needs to be addressed as risk factors are linked to lifestyle, dietary habits: Researcher

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Over four in five Singapore residents – 83.5 per cent – can recognise and correctly identify the symptoms of diabetes, but younger people tend to be less knowledgeable about the condition.

Those aged 35 and above are about twice as likely to correctly recognise diabetes symptoms compared with those aged between 18 and 34, according to the results of a study by several public health institutions here released yesterday.

This gap in knowledge about diabetes among younger people is a crucial area that needs to be addressed, said Professor Chong Siow Ann, who is the vice-chairman of the Medical Board (Research) at the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) and the principal investigator of the study.

“This is important as the modifiable risk factors are related to lifestyle and dietary habits, and these healthy patterns ought to be established early in life as prevention is far more effective if it is done early,” he added.

The study also found that Malay respondents, women and those diagnosed with diabetes were more likely to recognise diabetes compared with Chinese respondents, men and those without a history of diabetes, respectively.

Prof Chong noted that another important finding was on why Singapore residents do not go for diabetes screening.

Their reasons can be addressed through initiatives, he said, so as to reduce the prevalence of diabetes and improve public health outcomes.

Almost half of the respondents –

44.8 per cent – said they did not know where to get free screening.

Procrastination was cited by almost a third of respondents – 32.2 per cent – as a reason why they avoided screening.

More than a quarter – 26 per cent – said they did not see the point of going for screening without subsequent follow-up or explanation from a healthcare provider.

The study was a collaborative effort by the IMH, Khoo Teck Puat Hospital (KTPH), National Healthcare Group Polyclinics, and the National University of Singapore’s Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health. It was funded by the National Medical Research Council

under the Health Services Research Grant.

The study began in 2018 and involved 2,895 Singapore citizens and permanent residents aged 18 and above.

It included a mix of people with and without diabetes.

Respondents were given a short description of symptoms affecting a hypothetical person to determine if they could recognise them as symptoms of diabetes.

During face-to-face interviews, they were also asked questions on the causes of diabetes, the complications of untreated diabetes and help-seeking behaviour.

Associate Professor Sum Chee Fang, a senior consultant at KTPH and Admiralty Medical Centre and a co-investigator in the study, said the finding that stood out for him was that the vast majority of respondents were willing to befriend

and socialise with people with diabetes.

Just 2.3 per cent of the respondents said they were unwilling to be friends with someone with diabetes, while 3.1 said they were unwilling to socialise with someone with diabetes.

One in eight – 12.6 per cent – was unwilling to employ someone with diabetes, and 28.2 per cent said they were unwilling to have someone with diabetes marry into their family.

Prof Sum said: “Even though some degree of stigmatisation remains, I hope that with increased understanding and acceptance of diabetes over time, the social space of people with diabetes will expand further, and they will be able to lead even more healthful, meaningful and fulfilling lives.”

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A man taking a diabetes test at an event earlier this month. A study found that almost half of the respondents – 44.8 per cent – said they did not know where to get free diabetes screening.
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