

In Conversation

A Physician Discusses
COVID-19 & Diabetes Care



A discussion with **JOHN ANDERSON, MD**

Q How are people with diabetes responding to the pandemic?

Dr. A: There's a lot of confusion out there. I try and remind people that having diabetes doesn't make them more likely to get the coronavirus. It means there's an increased risk of hospitalization and mortality if they do.

I had a patient with Type 2 diabetes who's overweight. I'd encouraged her to stay active, go walking. Last time we talked she told me her grown son wouldn't let her leave the house for fear of the coronavirus. I told her in no uncertain terms: Get outside.

People seem to think the coronavirus is in the environment, that it's going to fall from the trees. There's no reason people, especially those with Type 2 diabetes trying to maintain their health, shouldn't be gardening, mowing their lawns and going for walks in open areas.

Q Are your patients adapting to telemedicine?

Dr. A: It just depends. I have some savvy elderly folks who handle it on their own. But then I had one patient with shingles. I needed to see the shingles, but I couldn't get him to move the phone away from his ear.

With older patients, there's usually an adult child, a daughter, helping them use the iPhone. Most of the time I just need to check in with older patients and make sure things are going okay.

Q Is fear of COVID-19 preventing people from getting care?

Dr. A: Unfortunately, yes. I had a patient a couple weeks ago, a man in his 70s with heart disease and AFib. On Friday night he called our after-hours line complaining of chest pain. The nurse told him to go the emergency room. On Saturday they talked again. She urged him again to go to the emergency room. He said he would just wait and see me on Monday. Monday morning I got the death certificate.

Fear of the coronavirus kept him from going to the emergency room. Some people are afraid to visit their doctor too. I have no doubt that some of my patients don't have their blood pressure under control, or they're experiencing headaches. Normally, they'd make an appointment and come see me. But now they want to just kick the can down the road.

I worry that more people will die of heart attacks, sepsis and heart failure than of COVID-19 before this is all over.

Q Is there any benefit to diabetes patients from all of this?

Dr. A: If patients were ever going to get serious about getting their diabetes and glucose under control, this is the time. I tell them, make sure you have a 90-day supply of insulin and medication and enough testing supplies. Be in touch with your care team. This break from normal life can be an opportunity to take control of your health.



**Alliance for
Patient Access**

John Anderson, MD, is an internal medicine specialist and a member of the Alliance for Patient Access.

JUNE 2020