

Co-Creating Health case study: Working closely with health professionals has really opened my eyes

I'm what they call an expert patient. I've been self-managing my diabetes for a long time. But I've still learnt a lot from the courses as they've been so specialised. It's helped to dispel some myths. Like, when I was first diagnosed my sister said 'Oh God, whatever you do, don't cut your own toenails, you'll have to have it done for you now'.

You know if you add it all up, the average person with a long term health condition actually only spends about seven hours per year in the company of a health professional. The rest of the time you're on your own. You are self-managing whether you are aware of it or not really, so you might as well learn as much as you can.

I've used all the things I've learnt to improve my relationship with my GP. Now, possibly without him even knowing it, he's asking all the right questions. At the end of the session he'll always ask, 'Is there anything else?' And he'll keep on until I say 'No, that's it'. So in a subtle way he's been trained too.

My last HBA1C count was six, which is actually in the non-diabetic range so I'm obviously doing something right! I used to be on insulin but I've come off that now and I can manage my diabetes just with tablets and through diet and exercise.

I'm now involved in training patients and health professionals through the Self-Management (SMP) and Advanced Development (ADP) programmes. Working so closely with health professionals has really opened my eyes and made me far more appreciative of the services I get.

They're improving the courses all the time. When I first went on the ADP tutor training a lot of it went over my head. I was the only patient in a room with all these health professionals, which was really daunting. I didn't really know why I was there. Then I had to cancel because of my health, so I joined a later course. By then the content had changed significantly, it's much more balanced now and there's a clear role for the patient.

Let's face it, you never stop learning. That's one of the many things I enjoy about delivering the SMP courses, meeting other individuals living with diabetes and learning from them. Plus it feels like I'm doing something constructive and helping others, which is a way of helping myself I suppose.

It's useful to keep in touch with people. There are reunions every three months or so, but I think it could be a more regular drop in, maybe mixing up patients and health professionals

who've done the courses. We need to keep the momentum going. People are always really positive after going on a course. The key is getting more people on the courses, you know, so more people can spread the word.