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The Media Image of the Diabetic

As a type one diabetic, being diagnosed at the age of five years old, I've always known what the basic differences were between type one and type two diabetes. However, when I sit down to watch the news and there's a new story on diabetes, I rarely hear anything that would apply to type one diabetics. I hear about these rising rates and that's it's all because Americans are becoming more and more obese, and I am left to wonder what my friends think of me. All the news says is "diabetes," "diabetics," and "obesity," so will my friends think I'm diabetic because I'm overweight? Or that I'm overweight because I'm diabetic? Do they think I'm the same as what the media portrays as these men and women who weigh five hundred pounds and eat McDonald's around the clock who are so easily put down by anyone and everyone? The media should specify what type of diabetes they deliver news on because people are confused on the role obesity plays in the cause of diabetes.

There is a significant difference between type one and type two diabetes. Web MD reports, "Type 1 diabetes occurs when the body's own immune system destroys the insulin-producing cells of the pancreas," and nobody has figured out why it happens (Type 1 Diabetes 1). That means that so far there is no cure for type one diabetes, and no matter the amount of exercise or weight stripped off, they'll be diabetic. On the topic of type two diabetes, Web MD lists possible reasons one can get type two diabetes, including but not limited to obesity, having

family members who also have type two diabetes, being over the age of 45, inactivity, or having high blood pressure (Type 2 Diabetes 2). They also explain, "Unlike people with type 1 diabetes, people with type 2 diabetes produce insulin; however, either their pancreas does not produce enough insulin or the body cannot use the insulin adequately" (Type 2 Diabetes 2). That means that *some* -- let's note that "some" I italicized -- type two diabetics are able to fight against their diabetes by losing weight or working towards being more active or lowering their blood pressure. On the flip side, other factors can't be fought. You can't change your genetics or your age.

For some odd reason, though, the average person doesn't know anything other than the fact that obesity causes some kind of diabetes. The article "Why Society Hates Diabetics" puts it in words I don't think I'll ever be able to top; the author claims, "fat = ugly and diabetes = fat (as far as the average person is concerned) then diabetes = ugly" ("Why Society Hates Diabetics" 9-13). Whether you like it or not, it's an excellent explanation. When someone says "I'm diabetic," those who are not educated or do not know the difference between the types, or even any kind of specifics on diabetes, connect the diabetic to the media image of a morbidly obese man or woman. In reality, diabetics are people like you and me, living daily life; about 26 million people are diagnosed with diabetes (Type 2 Diabetes 1). Even if I couldn't pin-point the exact wording, I knew it, even in elementary school. I never wanted people to know about it; it was my big secret. I was ashamed, just as many other diabetics surely feel. Just a few simple words added to a news report could contribute to helping change the idea that diabetics are all obese, lazy men and women. There's also the news stories in journals that just have "Diabetes." It happens on both CNN and NBC. CNN's article is just titled "5 Million More People Living

with Diabetes" (Wilson). NBC makes the same mistake ("Your Health"). It's the generalizations like this that lead people to the conclusion that the words laced amongst the articles, such as "obesity epidemic," relate back to all diabetics and create the media portrayal of diabetics as fat monsters ("Your Health" 2). The connection should be cut. Would you want to be linked to that kind of image?

What the media portrays a diabetic as isn't even accurate and causes discrimination against diabetics. Diabetics of both types are more susceptible to depression than the average person ("Living With Diabetes" 3). If you think about it, the connection is sure to cause a lower self-esteem, being a factor in the susceptibility to depression. With the media specifying what type of diabetes they're reporting about, the media image will change and hopefully the rate of depressed diabetics will lower. Depression is linked to suicide, and studies suggest diabetics are more suicidal ("Diabetes and Suicide" 3). With my proposal, we could save lives. How gratifying would that be?

At this point you may be telling yourself, "That's all good for diabetics, but how does this affect me?" Like I said earlier, it's estimated that about 26 million Americans are diagnosed with diabetes (Type 2 Diabetes 1). That's a lot of people, sadly enough, meaning it's likely either you or someone you know is related to a person with diabetes. Having the disease is stressful enough; how would you feel if you needed to prick fingers and arms, take shots, watch everything you eat, plus see how society treated you and others like you? These are your loved ones, or your loved ones' loved ones. They shouldn't have to suffer because society doesn't know what a disease is actually caused by, or because they don't know what people with that disease look like. Support in any kind of area is always appreciated, but as mentioned before, there

could be lives at stake. The proposal to just specify what type of diabetes you're reporting on could save your loved ones, or at least help them in their darkest time. It does connect back to you, and it should matter.

It may be hard to imagine what such a simple idea could bring, and how it could even work. Aren't there other ideas that would be bigger and gain publicity? Well, yes, my dear reader, you could get money to make an hour long documentary on the differences between type one and type two diabetes, but it's already been done. There's also something obvious to point out. Who sits down in front of their TV and says to themselves, "Geez, I wish there was an hour long documentary on diabetes on television tonight, guess I'll just have to settle for American Idol?" Nobody who didn't already know the difference would want to watch it, so it would change relatively nothing, wasting a colossal amount of money in the process. Just saying specifically "type one" or "type two" in a news report is free, takes little effort, and will reinforce the idea that diabetics are not what the media portrays them as. Over time, the idea will finally sink in to society's head that what they originally thought a diabetic was or what a diabetic looked like is wrong. It would take very little effort as compared to a documentary and wouldn't waste money.

If the media were to specify on whether they were talking about type one or type two diabetes, diabetics would feel better about themselves and society would be better as a whole. Society shouldn't be left in the dark on an increasingly common subject. As a diabetic myself, I know how it feels to live in fear of the media image of a diabetic. When the automatic link between the growing obesity problem and both types of diabetes is cut, more diabetics will find comfort in having diabetes of either type.

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