

Media Release

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Diabetes sufferers have success with weight management program

Tharawal Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS) at Campbelltown has so far seen 'outstanding results' in clients participating in a trial to show type 2 diabetes remission can be achieved through a weight management program provided in primary care.

Eight Tharawal AMS clients aged 49 to 63 are participating in the DiRECT-Aus research trial in two phases, with clients in the first phase already experiencing weight loss of up to 15kg and improving their glycemic control without the use of diabetes medications.

The trial is a partnership between Diabetes NSW & ACT, five primary health networks, including South Western Sydney Primary Health Network (SWSPHN), and the University of Sydney. Five general practices in South Western Sydney are participating in the trial.

It is looking to replicate the active arm of the DiRECT-UK Diabetes Remission Clinical Trial which saw type 2 diabetes remission achieved in 67 per cent of participants with weight loss greater than 10kg.

Diabetes is a chronic condition that affects the way the body processes blood sugar known as glucose. You need to maintain a healthy level of glucose in your blood for your body to work properly.

Dietitian Renee Zahar is part of the specialist team – including a GP and registered nurse – overseeing the project at Tharawal AMS.

She said the trial gave her clients access to a free diet replacement product which caused rapid weight loss, the support of the specialist team and other clients, and education about healthy food choices.

"The results have been outstanding," Ms Zahar said.

"With the initial cohort I have seen weight loss of up to 15kg and excellent glycemic control – all without the use of diabetes medications. With the second cohort, in just four weeks we had weight loss of up to 7.7kg and a drop in blood glucose levels, again without medication or greatly reduced doses to get started.

"What I am most thrilled about is the positive impact it's had mentally on the clients. Their relationship with food has changed, it's incredible. They are more in control, have greater energy, and are fitter and stronger.

"It has also had a profound impact on their families – family members have lost weight because of healthier food choices."

Clients have praised the project.

One said: "I have so much energy now and it feels really great. I have tried everything and nothing has worked until now".

Another said: "I love the convenience of this program and how easy it is to have my shakes and bars instead of going to all the takeaway food outlets that I used to. I'm choosing healthy options now. My sugar levels are great at the moment with no medication".

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SWSPHN Chief Executive Officer, Dr Keith McDonald PhD, said the diagnosed incidence of diabetes had increased by more than 158 per cent in South Western Sydney since 2000 and 6.9 per cent of our community currently lived with the condition.

“Type 2 diabetes is a significant health burden within South Western Sydney accounting for 87.1 per cent of all diabetes cases,” he said.

“Fairfield local government area (LGA) has the highest rates followed by Campbelltown and Liverpool. Also, South Western Sydney has higher prevalence of gestational diabetes than state and national rates.”

Dr McDonald said SWSPHN was pleased to support the trial by having an active role in supporting local general practices interested in becoming a trial site.

“The trial has also been an opportunity to provide upskilling and capacity building to general practices, to support GPs in identifying patients at risk of type 2 diabetes and embed early weight management strategies into their practice to improve their patient’s health and quality of life.”

Enquiries about the DiRECT-Aus research trial can be directed to SWSPHN’s Vitor Rocha via email Vitor.Rocha@swsphn.com.au

South Western Sydney PHN is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to supporting general practitioners, practice nurses and other primary health providers to deliver the best possible care for their patients. Our aim is to improve access to quality local healthcare for all residents living in the local government areas of Bankstown, Fairfield, Liverpool, Campbelltown, Camden, Wollondilly and Wingecarribee.

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