Diabetes in the Workplace

Diana Madera Escobedo  
*University of the Pacific*, d_maderaescobedo@u.pacific.edu

Guadalupe Gomez  
*University of the Pacific*, g_gomez7@u.pacific.edu

Sarah Vang  
*University of the Pacific*, s_vang21@u.pacific.edu

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Abstract
The workplace can be a challenging place for individuals to attend to their diabetes. People with diabetes are entitled to accommodations through the federal law, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which are set to support this community in the workplace to meet their health needs. An open and closed-ended questionnaire was developed, and the research collected data from 10 participants on their accommodation use in the workplace and identified barriers to accessing accommodations. Participants suggested that accommodations were necessary to manage their diabetes and therefore a substantial effort needs to be made so people with diabetes are supported in the workplace to live a quality life. In addition, the study found participants had little awareness of the accommodations they are entitled to. The study highlights the importance of workplace accommodations for people with diabetes.

Introduction
Diabetes has increased in prevalence over the past decades and continues to rise, with 1.5 million Americans diagnosed with diabetes every year (CDC, 2020). This disease can impact people of all ages, including working-age adults (ages 18-64). Millions of Americans have been diagnosed with diabetes, most of whom continue to be or wish to be part of the workforce (American Diabetes Association, 2009). There are a variety of responsibilities an employee has and with the added chronic illness, this can be overwhelming without appropriate accommodations. Diabetes is recognized as a disability under the ADA and therefore, people with diabetes are entitled to accommodations in the workplace. Workplace accommodations includes but are not limited to…

- Allow for storage of medications, such as insulin and/or food.
- Allow frequent breaks for food as needed.
- Provide a rest area to reorient after hypo/hyperglycemia episode.
- Provide an area to test blood sugar levels.
- Provide a rest area for reorientation after hypo/hyperglycemia episode.

The ongoing management of diabetes can be associated with burnout and distress (Nefs & Pouwer, 2018). People may neglect their health in the workplace, and when a person with diabetes is not paying attention to their health needs, this can impact their overall quality of life.

Method
The research study seeks to evaluate employees’ awareness of their rights to diabetes-related accommodations in the workplace and the barriers of those who have utilized workplace accommodation.

Study Design: mixed-method self-reported questionnaire
Data Collection: study utilized social media platforms to recruit participants to complete questionnaire via Google Forms.
- questionnaire was divided into consent, demographic information, and critical accommodations
Data Analysis: an excel spreadsheet was utilized to organize the data and generate preliminary themes arising straight from the data.

Results
- Some participants are not receiving diabetes accommodations.
- 50% of the participants were not aware of the ADA accommodations.
- Participants found most helpful that are already part of the ADA were:
  1. The storage for medications, insulin, and/or food.
  2. Allowing frequent breaks to attend to their glucose levels/reorienting from hypo/hyperglycemia.
  3. Provide an area to test blood sugar levels or attend to their diabetes in private.
- Barriers participants face were:
  1. Lack of knowledge of the ADA accommodations they are entitled to.
  2. Accommodations needed tend to interfere with the participant’s work requirement.
- No privacy or shame of people knowing and not wanting others to know about it.

Discussion
When workplaces do not accommodate employees and their diabetes care, their health may worsen, impacting their ability to work. The ADA prohibits people with diabetes from getting harassed or discriminated against in workplaces and guarantees accommodations to create a safe work environment. Findings suggest that many are not receiving accommodations, although the ADA sets specific accommodations that employees are entitled to. The results in this study offer guidance to bring awareness to employees about ADA accommodations. All accommodations should be tailored to the individual and efficiently promote the individual to perform their job responsibilities. Recommendations also include...

- Nurses, physicians, social workers, and other health providers should provide patient education on their rights to accommodations to support their diabetes management.
- Stricter policy be implemented to ensure the workplace provides accommodations.
- Human resource promote education about accommodations and employee protections.
- Further research on people with diabetes and their health outcomes when using workplace accommodations.

Conclusion
The findings from our research study determined that there are employees with diabetes that are not receiving accommodations, although the ADA allows these accommodations. The obstacles participants encountered to receive the accommodations include lack of awareness of the ADA, managing their diabetes in their way when working, and some felt ashamed of people knowing or wanting to keep their health information private. More education of laws and policies should be promoted in the workforce. All accommodations should be tailored to the individual and their diabetes-management needs.

References