

# DIABETES IN THE WORKPLACE

## difficulties and dilemmas

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## THE “DARK AGES” (pre 1988)

- No individual assessment
- Blanket bans
- Decision made by occupational physicians only
- Diabetological input minimal

## THE DARK AGES (2)

Questions on employment medical forms:-

- “Is the diabetes controlled?”
- “How often does the applicant test his/her urine for sugar
- “Is the daily dose of insulin over 40 units?”
- “Does he/she adhere to a diabetic diet?”

# THE DARK AGES (3)

## Occupational physician comments

- “As a diabetic on insulin, he cannot of course work a shift system”
- “The daily dose of insulin is 70 units, compatible with a more serious form of the disease”
- “I note he takes 4 injections of insulin per day, clearly indicating the severe nature of the disease”

# “THE BREAKING DAWN” 1988-1997

- Fight for individual assessment
- High profile individual cases
- Fight for diabetological input
- BDA/political pressure
- Patient power



# DIABETES AND FIREFIGHTING (1)

- Home Office regulations arbitrary prior to 1988, occasional firefighters on insulin allowed.
- 1988, rules tightened. Insulin treatment a bar to active service.
- 20 UK firefighters dismissed.



## DIABETES AND FIREFIGHTING (2)

- 1988-1990, appeals heard (by occupational physicians only)
- Successful reinstatement of Tim Hoy in London, 1990
- Extensive support and lobbying from BDA



## DIABETES AND FIREFIGHTING (3)

- Support from Faculty of Occupational Physicians (1992) for more liberal approach.
- 1992, Home Office agrees that all appeals should involve diabetologist as well as occupational physicians.
- 1994 Home Office officially accepts policy of individual consideration.

## DIABETES AND FIREFIGHTING (4)

- Tim Hoy leads “IRDF”
- Currently about 200 firefighters on insulin in active service
- Firefighting has become a model for safe employment of diabetic persons into potentially hazardous employment







# OTHER EMPLOYMENT PROBLEM AREAS (1990-1997)

- Armed services
- Emergency services
- Taxi driving
- Rail workers
- Off-shore workers



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## SOME EXAMPLES -

- A 26 year old female hairdresser applied for a job in the hair salon of a large cruise liner. She was accepted, but later failed her medical because she had type 1 diabetes. After strong appeals, with support from the BDA and her diabetologist, she was reinstated.



## AND MORE -

- Other cruise liner employees (photographer and disco dancer)
- Oil rig engineer
- Falmouth harbourmaster
- Shetland ferryman

## AND MORE -

- Airline cabin crew
- Train staff (not driving)

*Rules for all of these usually defended by the need for emergency drill.*

## BDA STANCE 1996

- Diabetes should be a bar to very few jobs.
- If a job is potentially hazardous, there should be:-
  - a) individual consideration
  - b) diabetologist involvement
  - c) strict control/complication criteria
  - d) regular diabetes/employment review



# DIABETES AND POTENTIALLY HAZARDOUS OCCUPATIONS (BDA, 1997)

1. Physical and mental fitness in accordance with non-diabetes standards.
2. Diabetes under regular review
3. Diabetes under stable control
4. Self-glucose monitoring, education and motivation required.

5. No disabling hypoglycaemia

6. No advanced complications

7. No significant large vessel disease

8. Annual reassessment for employment by occupational physician and diabetologist.

# THE ENLIGHTMENT (almost!) 1998 to present

- Further fights against discrimination
- Acceptance of individual assessment
- Problems with EEC law
- Disability Discrimination Act (+EA)
- Emergence of evidence

# EMPLOYMENT AND DIABETES - evidence

- No increased unemployment in those with young type 1 diabetes.
- Severe complications do reduce unemployment prospects.
- Some increase in sickness absence with diabetes
- Hypoglycaemia in the workplace relatively uncommon (more usually at home).

# THE “C1, D1” ISSUE

- European Directive 1998
- C1 vehicles (large vans and small lorries, 3.5- 7.5 tonnes) and D1 vehicles (8-16 seater minibuses)
- Those with diabetes on insulin barred from driving these vehicles

## C1, D1 VEHICLES (2)

- Potential loss of jobs for postmen, builders, teachers, charity workers etc
- Intensive pressure by Diabetes UK 1998-2000
- Use of 1997 BDA guidelines suggested

## C1, D1 VEHICLES (3)

- Individual assessment accepted for C1 vehicles (with annual diabetologist assessment), 2000
- D1 vehicles still banned

# DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION ACT (DDA)

- Passed 1995. Amended 2005. Armed and emergency services originally excluded.
- Equality Act 2010
- Diabetes (type 1) included as a disability



## DDA AND EA (2)

- Have reduced arbitrary bans on employment, and reduced “concealment” problem
- Not all with diabetes are protected (eg uncomplicated type 2)
- Nevertheless, the DDA and EA make employers think very hard before barring diabetes.

# MORE EEC LAW 2011

- Further European Directive on driving
- Redefinition of severe hypoglycaemia rules, nocturnal hypoglycaemia included
- Insulin-treated diabetic drivers can apply for Class 2 licences

# REMAINING PROBLEMS (1)

- *Taxi driving* – licensing by local authorities with variable rules. Postcode lottery
- *Police* – normal duties allowed (about 250 on insulin in service). Occasionally, response driving and armed units allowed.
- *Armed services* – still exempt from DDA and don't recruit on insulin. Moving to insulin in service – the “potato-peeling syndrome”.

## REMAINING PROBLEMS (2)

- *Ambulance driving* – still a postcode lottery, but London successfully allowing insulin-treated personnel with strict surveillance.
- *Offshore* – some movement (haircutting allowed!), but “watch keeping” still a bar. Two lifeboatmen on insulin are in service
- *Commercial flying* – Canada recently licensed a long-haul pilot on insulin.

