Once you express a good idea, the rest will follow: the domino effect

Dominoes are an interesting gaming tool. They are simple building blocks that can be assembled in countless ways to generate a large variety of games. These games can be simple or really complex. Some games involve gameplay that is almost mechanical, while others require great skill and strategy.

A domino show is created by setting up dominoes in a long line, and then toppling them to create a chain reaction. This is also called the domino effect. The first domino is usually toppled by hand. People all over the world try to set up incredible domino projects. A domino show is inherently exciting because of its risky nature. Everybody understands that every new domino set up creates an added risk of losing the recently completed progress.

So, you might ask, what does this have to do with diabetes and diabetes educators? The role of the diabetes educator is to regulate the toppling of the dominoes of diabetes and to direct them in an organised way so that the end result is success. The risk of the set-up dominoes needs to be removed by educating patients and helping them to follow a good path. Dominoes can be exciting when they topple over and form incredible pictures, but on the other hand, it can be devastatingly disappointing if they fall over, uncontrolled. And this exhilaration or frustration is just like diabetes. When diabetes is uncontrolled, there is much despondency and disappointment. All the hard work seems to be to no avail.

The secret of a successful domino effect pertains to the old saying of “well begun is half done”. What is a “well begun” in diabetes? This is the building of a superior foundation of comprehensive and efficient education for the patient, as well as the involvement of other members of his or her healthcare team.

This year, the Diabetic Education Society of South Africa (DESSA’s) theme for its workshop at the Society of Endocrinology, Metabolism and Diabetes of South Africa (SEMDSA) is “Dominoes in diabetes”. We plan to offer our members the opportunity to interact, share and network with experienced colleagues and be up-skilled in working with patients with diabetes.

This is not the only exciting event on the DESSA calendar this year. We are officially hosting our first DESSA conference in Durban. This will be during the weekend of 8 and 9 June 2013. The theme for the conference is “Walking with diabetes” and will take place at Tsogo Sun North Beach Hotel in Durban. The conference is going to cater for all healthcare professionals who specialise in diabetes, or who are interested in diabetes management and education. It should not be missed as it will be attended by two very interesting international speakers and includes a fantastic workshop on helping patients on how to manage their insulin doses.

As an educator, it is important to “walk with your patient”, as opposed to pointing your patient in a certain direction. We should not be making decisions for him or her, but collaborating with him or her to compromise on an achievable end goal.

At DESSA, we truly believe that diabetes educators provide vital insights into self-care behaviour that assist patients with keeping their diabetes in check. By walking with the patient and directing the domino effect, we can add value to a patient’s life.

The patient’s journey

Walk beside me (and show me the way)  
Don’t walk ahead  
For I may not follow  
Don’t walk behind  
For I may not lead  
Walk instead beside me  
And together we will find the way.