

Evaluation of an online Diabetes Needs Assessment Tool (DNAT) for health professionals: a randomised controlled trial

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Aims

The medical profession has a tradition of self-directed learning based on the individual's identified priorities for learning. However, there is evidence that this ability to self-assess is limited, and that the least competent are also the least able to self-assess. It may therefore be of benefit to have some form of external assessment. Whilst many diabetes educational programmes have been explored, few have been assessed in a systematic manner. As diabetes is an increasingly prevalent disease, effective methods for the dissemination and understanding of clinical guidelines need to be explored. We conducted a randomised controlled trial to evaluate the effectiveness of using an online Diabetes Needs Assessment Tool (DNAT) to improve health professionals' knowledge of how to manage diabetes; to evaluate the acceptability of this process of learning and self-reported changes in clinical practice as a result of this educational process.

Methods

Design: Multi-centred randomised controlled trial.

Outcome measures: Primary - diabetes knowledge at 4 months and secondary - self-reported changes in clinical practice and acceptability of learning materials.

Sampling: Health professionals, both doctors and nurses managing diabetes patients, were recruited from the UK and Germany.

Process: The DNAT is a computerised test that adapts to the knowledge level of the learner and is comprised of clinically rich case problems developed by a group of diabetologists/educationalists. After giving consent, eligible registered participants were given an online baseline diabetes knowledge test and then randomised to one of two groups using a stratified minimisation method. The control group were only given access to online diabetes learning modules whereas the intervention group were also given the DNAT for a 4 month period. After this time, both groups were administered a second diabetes knowledge test and a questionnaire assessing the acceptability of the learning materials. One month later, all participants were asked to complete a questionnaire measuring self reported changes in clinical practice. On completion of the DNAT, a personalised learning report was created for each participant identifying needs alongside individualised recommendations of the most appropriate modules to meet those requirements.

Study status

The full protocol for this study has been published at:
<http://www.trialsjournal.com/content/10/1/63>

We are currently preparing the publication of the main findings for submission to a journal