

Today's Dietitian

JANUARY 2005
THE MAGAZINE FOR NUTRITION PROFESSIONALS

JANUARY 2005

dynamics of diabetes



On the *dLife* TV set are, left to right, comedian and actor J. Anthony Brown, veteran TV and screen actor Jim Turner, former Miss America Nicole Johnson Baker, *dLife* advisory board member Dr. Bob Arnot, and *Mother Love* (author and self-proclaimed “Queen of Advice”).

dLife-ful!

BY KATE JACKSON

Managing diabetes is a formidable challenge that plays out on a daily basis. Gathering the information needed to not only survive but also thrive can be a

consuming effort. With patient-physician consultations dwindling and certified diabetes educators' time at a premium, consumers can't possibly get all the data and resources they need from their

healthcare providers. Patients are frustrated—not by a lack of information but rather by the lack of a centralized source of information and network for support.

Patients who have hoped for a one-stop-shopping approach to diabetes information can take heart. Previously, says Howard Steinberg, CEO and founder of *dLife*, For Your Diabetes Life!, “there has been no single go-to brand—no consumer brand—for everything that the diabetes patient would need.” Enter *dLife*, a new type of patient-consumer resource.

It's not a scientific source, he says, nor a cause-related source. It's neither a research organization nor an association. Steinberg describes *dLife* as “the people's source.” It's a multimedia network for the diabetes community that provides “a consistent, centralized, visible, and accessible source for information and motivation for the 19 million Americans with diabetes, the millions more who care for them, and the more than 41 million Americans who have prediabetes.”

What that means is that

individuals with diabetes will be able to access information about their disease on a daily basis in familiar ways through an integrated multimedia network encompassing print media, the Internet, radio, and television.

Diabetes affects individuals every-where and every day, so that's where dLife will be found. "We have to be everywhere," says Steinberg. "What people do every day in their lives is where an entity like this needs to exist, so we're filling the gap in television, radio, and other places where there hasn't been an ongoing stream of consistent diabetes content and programming."

"It's a real struggle to get this monster under control. There's not only so much to know, but it requires enormous focus and motivation."

In June 2004, dLife, with Marketing Technology Solutions, conducted an online pilot study of 2,207 individuals with type 1 and type 2 diabetes, at-risk populations, and family members and caregivers that revealed a broad dissatisfaction with the then-current level of information available about diabetes and its treatment and management. Of these respondents, 76% expressed longing for a single credible source of diabetes information and 73% indicated that they'd be likely to watch a weekly television show that offered practical information and inspirational stories about diabetes. Research also indicated

that only 5% of the diabetes market aggressively sought information, suggesting that information must be delivered to the remaining segment of the market to effect change through networks they already tap into, such as those of the mass media.

Through all the dLife channels, patients will learn about medications, diet, exercise, and other strategies for regulating blood sugar. dLife TV will be a weekly series broadcast nationally on CNBC every Sunday night cohosted by Dr. Bob Arnot, former Miss America Nicole Johnson Baker, radio and TV personality Mother Love, and other personalities, who all have diabetes. The series aims to bring diabetes information in an entertaining format to the public, covering the latest medical news; diet, fitness, and exercise strategies; meal planning; celebrity profiles, and inspirational stories of lesser-known patients. On radio, the "dLife Minute" will air every day, offering similar information in a more concise fashion. In addition, dLife will involve a series of special events and educational programs at retail pharmacies, as well as interactive events across the country. Just as individuals with diabetes can find information through all these channels, providers of products and services can target individuals with diabetes through these same channels, delivering their message in a scope broader than ever before. dLife sprang from Steinberg's personal experience with type 1 diabetes and began to percolate approximately two years ago. "Over the years, I was getting good care and was managing pretty well," says Steinberg, who was diagnosed at the age of 10. He acknowledges, however, that it took an enormous effort to

maintain control. "It's a real struggle to get this monster under control. There's not only so much to know, but it requires enormous focus and motivation."

Steinberg's imagination, shaped by his marketing expertise, began to give shape to dLife. After building a successful marketing business, Steinberg began to think about diabetes in a broader way—not just as a problem for him but as a problem for millions. He points to data published last January in *The Journal of the American Medical Association* noting that less than 12% of people with diabetes meet recommended standards of blood sugar control—a crucial component of managing diabetes and avoiding complications and diabetes-related mortality. "What," he asked himself, "is the problem that prevents more people from doing what's necessary?"

Steinberg realizes that both information and motivation are key and that the healthcare professionals alone can't meet those needs. Diabetes educators, he says, reach only a minority of the population, and physicians spend only an average of eight minutes with each patient. It became clear to him that to bring about change, you must make contact with patients where they are. And the clear way to do that was to marshal the power of the mass media.

Roughly one year ago, Steinberg gathered a stellar team of media and marketing professionals and a medical advisory board and unveiled dLife in August 2004 at the conference of the American Association of Diabetes Educators, where he says it received a thunderous welcome. Meeting-goers applauded and embraced it.

"It was tremendous," says Steinberg. "There was so much

love coming to us.” Medical profession, educators, and dietitians, he says, indicated that the time was ripe for dLife. In December, dLife.com went live, and in early 2005, dLife will move to radio and television, with dLife TV beginning March 20.

Dietitians played an important role in the development of dLife, says Steinberg, but they will play a still bigger part as time goes by. In the early stages of content development, dietitians and other health professionals are going to be major players in providing content, patient insight, editing content, and ensuring that the enterprise meets its editorial policy guidelines.

Introducing the project, Steinberg told the press that it’s committed to empowering individuals with diabetes. “We can simply elevate the awareness, inform people on how to better manage their disease, and more importantly, give them a little daily dose of support and inspiration to take control. We can move millions via the power of mass media from complacency to engagement. The great thing about dLife is by offering marketers the opportunity to reach a highly targeted audience that needs their products and services, we enable better self-management, and that’s a win-win all around.”

Steinberg makes no claim that dLife will replace the healthcare professional, nor does it aspire to do so. Rather, dLife aims to generate more awareness so patients will take more interest in their own care and see medical professionals more regularly. His philosophy is simple: “The more engaged patient,” he says, “is a better patient.”