Examining Gender Differences in the Experience of Spousal Support in Effective Type 2 Diabetes Management

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Coping with a chronic illness such as type 2 diabetes affects not only the patient diagnosed with the illness but the spouse as well. However, there may be gender differences in the experience of type 2 diabetes. The current literature is limited in understanding gender differences in those with illness and their support providers as illnesses are typically studied that do not occur with the same frequency for men and women (e.g., breast cancer versus prostate cancer). The current study examined gender differences in the experience of diabetic patients and their spouses, where either wives or husbands were diagnosed with type 2 diabetes. Thus far, fourteen couples have been interviewed where one spouse had type 2 diabetes (mean age=??; 7 males with diabetes, 7 females). Each member of the couple completed measures that assessed marital satisfaction, depression, and perceptions of how the spouse was involved in problems dealing with the diabetes (uninvolved, supportive, collaborative, or controlling). Repeated measures analyses of variance were used to understand gender and perspective (patient versus support provider) differences. Wives tended to report more depression than did husbands (13.7 versus 7.7, p=.17), irrespective of whether they had diabetes or not. Wives also tended to report that their husbands were more uninvolved in their stress and coping efforts than did husbands (3.0 versus 2.5, p=.15), irrespective of whether they had diabetes or not. When wives had diabetes, couples perceived that spouses were more controlling than when husbands had diabetes and wives perceived their husbands as more controlling than did husbands. The results suggest that women may experience chronic illness as more distressing, irrespective of whether they have the illness or are the support provider. Data collection is ongoing and the results will be examined in the larger sample.