

PARTNERING FOR CHANGE

Chronic Care in Humanitarian Crises



BOUCHRA SAID
BEKAA VALLEY, LEBANON

Bouchra is 26 years old and has type 1 diabetes. She is a refugee from Syria and now lives in Lebanon.

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Patient profile

Bouchra has type 1 diabetes

When she was younger, Bouchra Said dreamt of studying English at university. Now, at the age of 26, she finds herself supporting a disabled father and four school-aged siblings in a foreign country where she has overstayed her permit. These burdens are compounded by constant concern about her blood glucose levels.

In 2011, after gradually losing a lot of weight, 18-year-old Bouchra was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes at a hospital in Eastern Al Ghouta in Syria. At the time, Bouchra and her family knew little about type 1 diabetes, but the doctor explained that it was a chronic condition that would require her to take daily insulin injections for the rest of her life. In Syria, Bouchra was provided with free insulin, and, with the help of a neighbourhood nurse, she learnt how to self-inject.

However, the war in Syria forced Bouchra to flee to Lebanon with her mother and younger siblings. They left in a taxi with none of their belongings as they thought their stay would be brief. Four years later, Bouchra and her siblings are still living in Barja, Lebanon. Their mother, who took care of the whole family, recently passed away unexpectedly, leaving Bouchra as the sole breadwinner.

Here in Lebanon, Bouchra has to pay for her medication and she cannot afford the prescribed medical tests, which means that she has not always managed to control her blood glucose levels well. After being hospitalised due to life-threatening diabetic ketoacidosis, Bouchra managed to borrow a glucometer as she could not afford to purchase one. Without a glucometer and certain medical tests, Bouchra could end up in a coma or suffer from debilitating diabetes-related complications.

Bouchra doesn't want her neighbours or employers to know that she has type 1 diabetes, which means support is scarce. While she might be able to receive free treatment at a medical centre in Hussainia, the cost of travel and equipment is prohibitive.

"After my mother died, I worried about taking care of my brothers and sisters. The doctor told me about some medical tests that need to be done, but I do not have enough money to do these medical tests."

PROFILE DETAILS

Name

Bouchra Said

Age at time of interview

26-years-old (April 2019)

Location

Barja, Lebanon

Country of origin

Syria

Year of leaving country of origin

2015

Type of diabetes

Type 1 diabetes

Year of diagnosis

2011

Diabetes-related complications

None mentioned

Occupation

She is employed at a company that specialises in tea, coffee and cleaning services



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HASSAN ALUBLEID
NABAA, LEBANON

Hassan is 56 years old and has type 2 diabetes. He is a bus driver and travels between Lebanon and Syria.

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Patient profile

Hassan has type 2 diabetes

As a bus driver, Hassan Alubeid travels from Syria to Lebanon about four times a month. Because of the war in Syria, the vehicle he drives – which belongs to his nephew – is registered in a Lebanon-Syria border database, and he is allowed to stay in Lebanon for up to 72 hours at a time.

Bouts of dizziness, fatigue, frequent urination and numb hands make Hassan's job as a driver more difficult. These symptoms prompted Hassan to seek medical help a year ago. His doctor in Syria diagnosed him with type 2 diabetes and prescribed medication to help him manage his condition. His doctor also explained why a healthy lifestyle is so important for people living with diabetes.

Hassan, who is a heavy smoker, understands that if he wants to reduce his symptoms and potential diabetes-related complications, he needs to take care of himself. As part of his diabetes management regime, Hassan walks for exercise; however, if he exerts himself too much, he experiences chest pain and has, in the past, collapsed. While Hassan tries to follow a healthy diet, he admits that he eats sweets (although he knows he shouldn't) and doesn't restrict himself if a delicious meal is placed in front of him.

Although he spends a fair amount of time in Lebanon each month, Hassan prefers to visit his doctor in Syria as he charges 10 US dollars for a consultation compared to the 100 dollars charged in Lebanon. Hassan's family – his two wives and two sons – are aware of his condition and give him support if he needs it. He prefers not to think too much about his condition, as he believes the stress will end up killing him.

"If I think or get worried, the diabetes will kill me."

PROFILE DETAILS

Name

Hassan Alubeid

Age at time of interview

56 years old (April 2019)

Location

Nabaa, Lebanon

Country of origin

Syria

Year of leaving country of origin

2014

Type of diabetes

Type 2 diabetes

Year of diagnosis

2018

Diabetes-related complications

None mentioned

Occupation

Bus driver



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RAGHEIDA MOUSSALLEM
JNAH, LEBANON

Ragheida is 57 years old and has type 2 diabetes. She is an immigrant from Syria and now lives in Lebanon.
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Patient profile

Ragheida has type 2 diabetes

Ragheida Moussallem, who is from Syria, fears that she will die soon. Her fears have nothing to do with the war that has ravaged her home country. It is her body run down with diabetes-related complications that concerns her: she needs (but cannot afford) a cardiac catheterisation, she has high blood pressure, she has cataracts and constant eye pain, and she struggles to walk on her swollen legs.

Diagnosed with type 2 diabetes more than 15 years ago, Ragheida does her best to manage her condition. She checks her blood glucose levels, she injects insulin twice a day, and she is careful about what she eats. Despite this, her blood glucose readings often reach dangerously high levels.

Ragheida and her husband live with six of their seven children (and grandchildren) in Beirut. Her children work as carpenters, but work is unreliable and money is scarce.

Ragheida recently discovered that she could get a free supply of insulin from a medical centre 20 kilometres from her home; unfortunately, the imported medicines are not always available. Doctors have told Ragheida that she requires a cardiac catheterisation and eye surgery, but she cannot afford these procedures. She believes that medical help would be cheaper in Syria. However, she cannot return as her hometown of Ghouta has been completely destroyed.

"When the people say that the diabetes is the worst disease in the world, they are telling the truth. The diabetes is very bad disease and it hurt my eyes so much, my heart too. I am so sad."

PROFILE DETAILS

Name

Ragheida Moussallem

Age at time of interview

57-years-old (April 2019)

Location

Beirut, Lebanon

Country of origin

Syria

Year of leaving country of origin

2012

Type of diabetes

Type 2 diabetes

Year of diagnosis

2004

Diabetes-related complications

Swelling in the legs (oedema), eye and heart problems

Occupation

None mentioned