

The Heart of Diabetes



Members of the Diabetes Network, supported in part by gifts to the Barnes-Jewish Hospital Foundation, meet at a local YMCA to review the goals they've set for themselves to better manage their diabetes.

A Community Network Takes Action before Heart Disease Takes Hold

In America today, 80% of people with diabetes will die of heart disease.

"Think of diabetes as accelerated starvation. If you are a diabetic, your body is starving itself of appropriate amounts of nutrients inside the cells," explains Clay Semenkovich, MD, chief of endocrinology at Barnes-Jewish Hospital and Washington University School of Medicine. "Most people think of diabetes as an inconvenience, but it is actually a lethal disease that commonly kills people because it leads to heart disease."

However, educating people about their diabetes enables them to significantly decrease their risk of heart disease because they are able to better manage their illness. In fact, when their disease is well-managed, most diabetics do not have significantly shorter lives than non-diabetics.

This is the message that Garry Tobin, MD, director of the Diabetes Center at Barnes-Jewish Hospital and Washington University School of Medicine, conveys through the Diabetes Network.

Diabetes Network: Bringing Crucial Information and Care to a Medically Underserved Population

Dr. Tobin was motivated to create The Diabetes Network, with the St. Louis Diabetes Coalition, after calculating that the number of practicing endocrinologists (doctors who treat diabetes) can only reach 3% of people with diabetes in the United States. In St. Louis, this means that of the nearly 150,000 diabetics, only about 4,500 will have an endocrinologist managing their care.

PHOTOS: TIM PARKER

To help the St. Louis community overcome this limitation, Dr. Tobin established the Diabetes Network through the Diabetes Center. The Network expands ways to provide local diabetics with information that will empower them to manage their health. The Network has reached nearly 350 people in 45 different groups at 34 locations throughout the city since its launch in 2007.

"The Diabetes Network is really about building relationships in the community," says Dr. Tobin.

The network relies on identifying people with diabetes who would be good educators, and who are motivated to help their community. Once the leaders are fully trained, they hold six sessions over a 12-week period, meeting within churches, community centers and civic organizations so that diabetic community members can come to familiar places to receive the information, support and care that they need.

The sessions are built around four components: individualized education and skills; personalized, achievable goal setting; patient empowerment; and promoting focused, structured patient-physician communication. The leaders help create a dialogue that leads members to create their own action plans to manage their disease within the context of their lives. Through this process, members learn how to speak to their physicians, make sure they have necessary resources and realize that they are the key component to managing their health.

"Because the diabetic session leaders have knowledge from their own diabetic challenges," says Dr. Tobin, "they are ideal mentors to other community members."

The consistent support of the Diabetes Network ensures that diabetics in St. Louis have the resources and information they need to stay motivated to continually do what is necessary to be healthy, decrease their likelihood for heart disease and remain a functional part of the community.

You Can Make a Difference!

There are not enough endocrinologists to serve the diabetic population. Programs like the Diabetes Network are invaluable in our community to bring life-saving knowledge and care to diabetics and, through testing, identify people with undiagnosed diabetes.

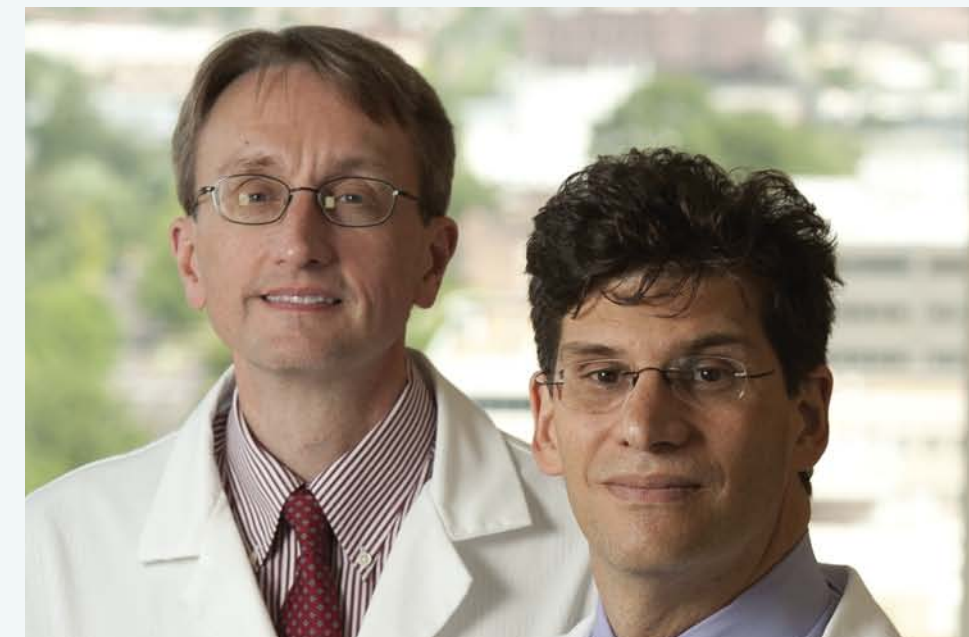
Barnes-Jewish Hospital and Washington University School of Medicine have a long tradition of conducting some of the most important research on diabetes anywhere in the world. Their findings are shared quickly and broadly, with direct impact on health and well-being in our community.

To support diabetes outreach like the Diabetes Network, please give to the Barnes-Jewish Hospital Foundation's Diabetes Fund (#7066) by using the enclosed envelope or donating at www.GivingBarnesJewish.org. If you have questions, please call David Sandler at 314-362-3499 or e-mail givingbarnesjewish@bjc.org.

▶ Dr. Semenkovich shares 10 health tips for preventing heart disease in people with diabetes online at www.GivingBarnesJewish.org/Semenkovich

"The Diabetes Network is really about building relationships in the community,"

—Garry Tobin, MD



Clay Semenkovich, MD, chief of endocrinology and Garry Tobin, MD, director of the Diabetes Center, are passionate about the grassroots outreach of Barnes-Jewish Hospital's Diabetes Network because it brings resources to diabetic community members who might otherwise not have them.