
POSTER ABSTRACT

Situational Analysis in Flanders: Self-Management and Digitalization for People with Type 2 Diabetes

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Background: According to the World Health Organization, diabetes directly caused 1.6 million deaths in 2021. Over a decade, the prevalence of Type 2 diabetes mellitus (T2DM) in Belgium increased from 5.4% in 2011 to 6.8% in 2021, with an estimated 400,000 Belgians undiagnosed. The International Diabetes Federation projects that 1 in 8 adults will be diagnosed with diabetes by 2045. This highlights the need for effective management strategies; however, implementation remains uneven across the healthcare systems. Health technology and digital tools could offer promising support for diabetes care.

Approach: Approximately 20 healthcare providers from various regions in Flanders, Belgium, in primary, secondary, and tertiary care settings, participated in focus group discussions. The primary objective of this study is to describe and explain the present status of self-management (SM) practices among patients T2DM on a regional level in Flanders and the fragmented state of care. Secondly the use of health information and communication technologies (ICT) such as electronic health records to facilitate and improve SM for these individuals will be explored as well. Lastly, we aim to explore the challenges and enablers within this context. Recordings were transcribed and analyzed by two independent researchers following the Braun and Clarke analytical approach.

Key Findings: Thematic analysis identified six major themes. Multidisciplinary and intersectoral collaboration emerged as essential, emphasizing the shared responsibility between healthcare providers (HCPs) and patients for effective and consistent self-management. Fragmented care highlighted the challenges of siloed healthcare sectors, disrupting continuity of care. Participants expressed a strong desire for technology integration, advocating for digital tools to support self-management and improve data transparency. The need for a unified, interoperable, and accessible platform was widely recognized to enhance healthcare coordination. Additionally, the study underscored the importance of patient empowerment and health literacy, emphasizing the role of education and support in fostering self-management. Finally, systemic pressure and GP workload were identified as key challenges, with general practitioners facing significant burdens that impact diabetes care delivery.

Implications: This study provides valuable insights into the self-management practices of people with Type 2 diabetes in Flanders and the role of health ICT in supporting their care. It identifies current practices, unmet needs, and barriers to implementing digital tools. These findings can help

policymakers and healthcare providers optimize digital health solutions and guide the development of tailored interventions that enhance self-management and improve patient outcomes.

Project Afterword

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