Type 2 DM Patients’ Fears to Needle – A Qualitative Study

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Introduction
Health care professionals often find it difficult to understand type 2 diabetes mellitus (DM) patients’ fear to needles, which is a major cause of insulin refusal.

Objectives
This study aims to find out the common fears to insulin therapy by singling out their source, context and process in the development of T2DM patients’ perception.

Methodology
24 focus groups were performed in 11 Hong Kong government primary care clinics. 127 type 2 DM subjects who had glycemic haemoglobulin ≥7.5 and were on maximum tolerable oral drugs without insulin were successfully interviewed.

Result
Many subjects perceived insulin needle to be the same as, or even worse than the one used for venous blood sampling. The preparation of injection site, injection technique and post-injection care require professional skills, which need to be operated by professional staffs with special training and it always results in blood loss. Injection complication will be serious and lethal because important organs underneath abdominal wall. Successful operation seems to be particularly unachievable for illiterate and old age subjects. For the subjects who had already acquired skills of injection because of family members’ need or personal experience, their fear was related to their friends or close relatives’ poor health outcome after initiating insulin. Majority of them could not recall any story of living well with insulin. In addition, they thought insulin damaged pancreatic cells. It also took over the body blood glucose
regulating system. Besides, the injection process damages self-image, ruined social relationships and causes stigmatization because the association of patients with terminal illness, disabled patients and intravenous drug users. Conclusions: Health care professionals should aware common rumours and misconceptions on needles and insulin injection. Early demonstration of insulin needles, injection pen, injection technique and mechanism of insulin action can correct misconceptions. Patient support groups by sharing successful, vivid insulin stories may help increasing acceptance to insulin.