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Perceptions of Using Diabetic Alert Dogs to Promote Occupations and Quality of Life

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Perceptions of Using Diabetic Alert Dogs to Promote Occupations and Quality of Life

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BACKGROUND

- Diabetic alert dogs are services dogs trained to alert people with diabetes of hypoglycemic or hyperglycemic episodes by detecting changes in odor released by the body to prevent severe side effects of these episodes (Beyond Type 1, 2021).
- Current research focuses on the effectiveness of diabetic alert dogs (Rooney et al., 2019; Weber et al, 2015; Lippi et al, 2016).
- Limited research explores the efficiency of diabetic alert dogs from the owner's perspective.

PURPOSE

- Conduct a research study that explores the impact of diabetic alert dogs on their owners occupations and quality of life from the owners perspective.
- Raise awareness of the use of diabetic alert dogs as an intervention to be recommended by occupational therapist.

METHODS

- A pilot phenomenological qualitative research study was utilized to gather information from individuals with type 1 diabetes that personally own diabetic alert dog about their experiences.
- Participants were recruited from Top Dog Professional Training facility in Burleson, TX, using a convenience sampling and snowball selection.
- 5 participants
- Completed virtual interviews via Zoom lasting between 30-45 minutes
- Thematic analysis was completed (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

RESULTS

Research Question

- In individuals with diabetes, how do diabetic alert dogs impact occupations and quality of life?

Qualitative Outcomes and Themes

Categories	Themes	Quotes
Occupations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact of diabetes on occupational participation • Improvements in occupational participation • Diabetes management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I love hiking and I always felt very insecure with hiking because that's like a pretty strenuous activity... which can give me some rapid and unpredictable lows" • "it's definitely enabled me to do more of my jobs effectively" • "a lot of it is the making taking care of something that's an obnoxious thing to take care of and actually turning it into a positive experience which has never I have never had in my life. It's always just like an annoyance, a negative thing. And having a dog makes it a positive experience and even fun".
Quality of life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxiety, stress, fear, or depression • My health, my control • Occupational participation • Feeling safe and secure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I have anxiety related to my diabetes... but I mean there are times of loneliness. There's times of being stressed out about it" • "I felt so much better... I feel like this is something that chose and I am in control of myself and my health" • I don't have that concern that you know I'm going to ignore it, and I'm going to be passed on the floor... because I know he's going to watch and he's keeping up, he's keeping me safe so I can do things too." • "I would say for sure I would be gone if it wasn't for him... he's just like a security blanket"

DISCUSSION

- Participants' occupations and quality of life were impacted by their diabetes.
- The findings from this research are consistent with Lippi et al (2016) were participants reported an enhancement in their quality of life and independence since living with their dog (Lippi et al, 2016).
- The findings from this research are in alignment with literature were it has been shown that diabetic alert dogs can benefit their owners psychologically (Seewoodhary et al., 2014).

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Future research would benefit from utilizing a larger sample size and age range.
- Future research should explore the impact of diabetic alert dogs on motivation to improve health management.
- Future research should examine the impact a diabetic alert dog has on family or caregiver burdens of individuals with type 1 diabetes.

CONCLUSION

This study contributes to the occupational therapy profession by providing a better understanding of the impact of diabetic alert dog on their owners occupations and quality of life as well as highlight the use of diabetic alert dogs as intervention for diabetes health management to be recommended by occupational therapist.

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