INTRODUCTION

Myths are defined as stories shared by a group, as part of the cultural identity. They have a strong influence in the life of individuals and their way of living which also includes seeking treatment during illness. Understanding the myths and misconceptions about the disease, like diabetes mellitus, is important in providing excellent care and health education to both patients and healthy individuals. Diabetes is a lifelong yet a controllable disease with its various short term and long term complications especially when it is not controlled properly. A major health hazard dealt with on a day to day basis need a very scientific understanding and myths only add to the misery of the individual patient because they are great hurdles in the way it should be addressed.¹

Diabetes has pandemic proportions in our country and we need not only to treat it meticulously but also to have a scrupulous understanding of it. Myths have usually cultural and social backgrounds and usually they stay in a certain society if not challenged by scientific discourse. Lack of education, poverty, lack to health care facilities added with multiple ethnic, linguistic and cultural groups add up to the emergence of many myths. Educational level is protective against myths.² People who start believing in myths seek treatment through spiritual, religious and unscientific means or resort frequently to alternative medicine like herbal medicine, aquatherapy and the like. These behaviors can have dangerous consequences and emergencies and even deaths can occur due to the lack of understanding of the behavior of a certain disease.³

The aim of this study was to find various myths about diabetes which prevail in our society.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

We conducted a cross sectional study in the private clinic of the author from January 2009 to December 2009, to assess the prevalence of myths related to diabetes and its treatment. One hundred consecutive patients were selected with various durations of disease. The aims and objectives were explained to the patients and after a written consent these patients were included in the study. The interview consisted of noting down demographic characteristics of the patient with 28 myths which prevail in our society with an affirmative and negative answer.

The interview was in a “Yes” and “No” format. The interview was done by a non-doctor assistant who could not be biased towards the subjects and the interviews took about ten minutes for each case. The results were then analyzed on SPSS version 10.

RESULTS

The study group consisted of 100 consecutive patients attending the out-patient of the author’s clinic. The demographic characteristics of this study group are given in Table 1.
DISCUSSION

Myths prevail and stay in the societies due to lack of education, cultural beliefs and dogmas. These beliefs become such deep rooted that they sound true and get inculcated in successive generations. They may become slightly modified but stay in a society for a very long time unless challenged by scientific discourse. These seemingly benign yet at times dangerous misperceptions can be blatantly misleading. They hinder scientific treatments and the whole mindset of society need to be changed to eliminate the scourge that they can have. To change the behavior of the population we need to educate its masses.4-9 Myths can sometimes be traced in history, at others they have been devised by anonymous people and not one but a group or probably whole generations. They must be known, traced out, understood and rejected by scientific reasoning. If properly explained, these myths can go out of the society but the job is certainly difficult and time consuming. We don’t have many studies of the social aspects of many diseases and very meager literature is available based on the subject. We have however carefully collected almost all the myths and the results are surprising as these myths are common even in people who are educated, though less common than the uneducated lot. Many more such studies must be encouraged to enable us to prevent these myths from creating hurdles for scientific understanding of such common diseases.

We have tried the common myths and the few papers we have found from India and Pakistan about these myths are almost identical except for few.3,10,11 The most widely believed myth was that eating more sugar causes diabetes. This is not entirely true as it is not directly related to eating sugar, but is very much affected by diet in general. Some people also believe that soaking feet in water helps in decreasing blood sugar levels, a concept which is certainly not true.

Some others are of opinion that herbal medicines are very effective in treatment of diabetes. These sections of people often present late to doctors and with complications as they first seek spiritual or herbal treatment. Nasir et al,10 reported high prevalence of such beliefs in spiritual treatment in Karachi, Pakistan. Another study conducted in Pakistan, reported similar findings that patients abandoned traditional medicine when their blood sugar went high11. People had a misconception that diabetes can occur only in old age. This is not true and they need to be made aware that in regard to age, diabetes spares no age group. There is certainly a higher chance of developing type 2 diabetes as you get older but people of all ages, including children can get diabetic and its pathology is multifactorial.

Another myth that surrounds diabetes is that it is contagious. This was also found in the study...
done in Pakistan by Nasir et al. Also people are not aware about the normal blood sugar levels, role of lifestyle changes in control and treatment of diabetes and that if not treated diabetes can lead to complications. 

The prevalence of myths was found to be higher in females. This is almost similar to what was found in the study by Nasir et al in Pakistan. The higher incidence of myths in females can be attributed to the fact that females are usually less
Myths about diabetes mellitus are prevalent in our society and this can have consequences upon the health seeking behavior of the people. In this study education is shown to be associated with decreased belief in myths. We need to educate people about this disease and its treatment options.

REFERENCES


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