

Special

TYPE 1 DIABETES

Advances in type 1 diabetes (T1D) treatments making difference for family facing a double challenge



Shirley-Anne Parsons and her son Nicholas hold up their insulin pumps that enable them to keep their blood glucose levels in a stable range. SUPPLIED

Shirley-Anne Parsons has a special bond with her son Nicholas – both have been diagnosed with type 1 diabetes (T1D).

Living with T1D has had a big impact on all Kluffinger-Parsons family members as their daily routine has been shaped by the necessity of “doing the work to avoid complications and survive,” says Ms. Parsons.

Explaining, “I’m not only Nicholas’s mom, but also his diabetes

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Dave Prowten
is president and CEO of JDRF Canada

mentor.” Ms. Parsons adds that she has become an advocate for other families facing a similar fate.

A key part of her efforts involves Ms. Parsons’s active engagement with the JDRF, whose work she believes is making a vital difference.

“As the leading global funder and advocate for T1D research that promises to better treat, prevent and ultimately cure this disease, JDRF continues to improve the lives of people affected by T1D,” says JDRF Canada president and

CEO Dave Prowten.

Ms. Parsons has witnessed many improvements in T1D treatment over the years. “The difference is like night and day from when I was diagnosed to how it is for Nicholas,” she says, noting she was diagnosed in 1986 at the age of 20. In 2006, she learned that her son had T1D.

There is a common misconception about T1D, according to Ms. Parsons. “It’s often confused with type 2 diabetes, and a lot of people still think T1D is diet related,” she said, explaining that in reality lifestyle has nothing to do with it. “Children, even babies, and adults get T1D because there is an autoimmune trigger that attacks the pancreas and causes it to stop producing insulin.” And a diagnosis means that people living with T1D have to frequently test their blood glucose levels and administer insulin to make sure they are in a normal range.

Ms. Parsons describes how she had to use a colour chart to gauge her blood glucose levels when she was first diagnosed. “There was no exact number; it was just a range,” she said. A glucometer she received in 1989 made a notable difference in her ability to manage T1D.

She says technology and care have steadily improved since then.

When Ms. Parsons and her husband decided to have a baby, they asked their physician about the chances of the child facing a T1D diagnosis. Ms. Parsons remembers the answer well: “We were told the risk was extremely low – in the neighbourhood of three to four per cent. But we fell into that percentage.”

Despite the initial shock of her son’s diagnosis, Ms. Parsons counts herself lucky that she recognized the symptoms early. “Nicholas had just turned three when we saw the signs,” she says.

Noticing increased thirst and frequent urination, she tested Nicholas with her glucometer. The result indicated full-blown T1D. Doctors at Vancouver’s Children’s Hospital confirmed the diagnosis and expedited training focused on medication, lifestyle, food and exercise to help the family learn how to deal with their son’s T1D.

ONLINE?

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Ms. Parsons says her role as a mother changed. “My job was not only to help Nicholas be a happy and successful child, but also to teach him to be safe when he is older.” That task requires Ms. Parsons to be vigilant to make sure Nicholas’s blood glucose levels are stable. “We have to test multiple times a day and twice a night,” she explains.

Both mother and son support JDRF because the advances in T1D research give them hope. “You frequently hear about a breakthrough that is in the wings, for instance the artificial pancreas system. It might be a few years away, but it could be something that Nicholas can take advantage of in the future,” Ms. Parsons explains.

And JDRF strives to make that future easier, says Mr. Prowten. “Living with T1D is a full-time job. This disease is with you for life and the obstacles that come with it never take a break. Many adults living with T1D were diagnosed as a child and can speak to the challenges they have experienced in various stages of their lives,” he explained. “We are working hard at JDRF to ensure future generations don’t have to face the burden of T1D.”

Ms. Parsons and her son are among those committed to helping others living with T1D. They frequently participate in fundraising activities such as JDRF’s TELUS Walk to Cure Diabetes. “Fire fighters came and drank lemonade,” said Nicholas proudly, recalling the time when he raised funds with a lemonade stand.

ABOUT JDRF

JDRF is the leading global organization focused on type 1 diabetes (T1D) research and the largest charitable funder and advocate for T1D research. Our mission is to find a cure for diabetes and its complications through the support of research.

Driven by passionate, grassroots volunteers, JDRF is passionate about our commitment to improving the lives of people affected by T1D by accelerating progress on the most promising opportunities for curing, better treating and preventing the disease. JDRF continuously strives to help people at all ages and all stages of T1D live better, longer, healthier lives.

Since its founding in 1970, JDRF has awarded more than \$1.7 billion globally to T1D research. JDRF research efforts have helped to significantly improve the care of people living with this disease and have expanded the critical scientific understanding of T1D. JDRF efficiently and effectively directs resources to research designed at finding a cure and developing new treatments, drugs and therapies, with more than 80 per cent of JDRF’s research expenditures directly supporting research and research-related education.

Through local chapters, international affiliates, volunteers, staff and corporate partnerships in over 100 locations worldwide, JDRF offers a diverse support network, outreach programs, advocacy initiatives and innovative fundraising programs.

For more information, or to make a donation, please visit jdrf.ca.

CURE. TREAT. PREVENT.

T1D – a non-preventable autoimmune disease

Type 1 diabetes (T1D) is often misunderstood. Unlike the more common type 2 diabetes, T1D is not caused by lifestyle factors. It is a non-preventable autoimmune disease in which the body’s immune system attacks and destroys the insulin-producing cells of the pancreas. It strikes children and adults suddenly, leaving them dependent on injected or pumped insulin for life.

More than 300,000 Canadian children, adolescents and adults live with T1D. This number is increasing by three to five per cent annually. People who have been diagnosed with T1D face a lifetime of careful management of their diet and exercise regimens. In addition, they need to test their blood sugar and administer insulin through injections or a pump



Nicholas Kluffinger-Parsons proudly remembers serving lemonade to fire fighters who came to support his fundraising efforts at the TELUS Walk to Cure Diabetes. SUPPLIED

multiple times per day in an effort to keep blood sugar levels within a normal range. People living with T1D are at risk for developing complications, such as blindness, kidney disease, nerve damage, stroke, heart disease and amputation.

JDRF (formerly known as Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation) is a non-profit organization founded in Canada in 1974. JDRF aims to find a cure for all individuals living with T1D.

Over the last four decades, JDRF-funded research has played an important role in accelerating progress toward finding a cure. More recently, JDRF has broadened its research objectives to include improving the lives and health of those who live with T1D and those who may yet be diagnosed. JDRF’s research goals are realized by projects that support

three basic areas: cure, treat and prevent.

Cure research focuses on restoring a person’s insulin-producing capability and halting or reversing the body’s misguided immune attack on the pancreas.

Treatment research looks at developing new devices and therapies that transform the way people with T1D treat the disease today in order to help them live healthier lives now and in the future.

Prevention research aims to keep future generations from getting T1D or stopping the disease process before it damages the pancreas.

These research areas highlight JDRF’s commitment to improving the lives of all those living with T1D while moving closer to a cure as soon as possible. For more, visit jdrf.ca.

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