

*More than 70,000
Hawai'i residents
suffer from diabetes.*

Defending against the Silent Thief

The Department of Health estimates that 72,000–100,000 Hawai'i residents suffer from diabetes, of which at least 25,000 cases are undiagnosed. Diabetes costs the United States more than \$100 billion per year, but its human costs are higher still. Untreated, it can lead to grave complications: kidney failure, heart disease, blindness, and infections that require amputation. The disease is sometimes called the “silent thief” because its symptoms can go undetected until it steals health, sight, or

limbs. These outcomes are frightening, but they are not inevitable. When diabetes is managed through healthy eating habits, exercise, medicine, and self-monitoring, people can live long and well with this disease.

Closely monitoring blood glucose is essential in controlling diabetes, but patients can do much more to safeguard their health. Julia Zee heads a CTAHR project that is part of a multi-state effort to develop and conduct community-based programs of diabetes education. The goal is to teach people with diabetes the value of five medical tests. Hemoglobin A1c levels indicate how well a patient has controlled blood sugar during the past three months. Keeping blood pressure and cholesterol levels healthy helps prevent complications. The microalbumin test detects

early signs of kidney disease. An annual eye exam can identify early damage in time to save vision.

CTAHR's diabetes education program is free, voluntary, and open to all. Research participants learn about the five tests and are given four of them. Along with the test results, they receive information, resource lists, lessons in nutrition and local-style healthy cooking, a gift certificate for groceries, and an opportunity to repeat the hemoglobin A1c test in three months. Working with cooperating agencies, the program has engaged 550 individuals through the research study. Educational sessions have reached an additional 2,000. By alerting patients to the risks that diabetes poses and empowering them to take charge of their well-being, CTAHR is helping to disarm the silent thief.

Photo courtesy of Julia Zee



As part of the Diabetes Awareness, Education, and Screening Project, Mary Ann Crosson, RN, BSN, draws blood from a participant on Moloka'i.

Diabetes