

POMPANO PEOPLE

Barbara J. Odom

Age: 66
Occupation: Registered nurse

Diabetes runs in Barbara Odom's family, and while she may not have the disease, she still has dedicated more than 20 years of her life to combat it. She was one of the first 1,100 people in the United States to be certified as a diabetes educator and has been a registered nurse for the past 36 years. As a diabetes educator, Odom enjoys combining her passions of assisting and educating patients with the disease.

Becoming a nurse did not happen over night for Odom—it was a lifelong dream. After spending time in a hospital when she was 6 years old with pneumonia and the



measles, she witnessed how well the nurses and doctors treated her and knew that was the profession she was destined for.

Her dedication to her craft and helping people earned her the 2007 Diabetes Educator of the Year by the American Diabetes Wholesale. She will be hon-

ored Friday at the American Diabetes Wholesale in Pompano Beach.

How did it feel to win the Diabetes Educator of the Year?

I was very shocked. I have a lot of patients and a lot of friends that felt I deserved the award, so they were really behind me.

What do you like about being a diabetes educator?

I enjoy helping someone to take control of their health and seeing them come from point A to point B. I enjoy teaching and seeing someone [live] a better lifestyle. I also enjoy mentoring other nurses and networking with other nurses around the country.

Are there any challenges in diabetes education?

It's a lifelong chronic disease. Some people have tak-

en years to develop certain lifestyles and it's hard to help them see the change. The other challenge is economically—it's a very expensive disease. We can't cure it, but it can be controlled.

How did you become a diabetes educator?

Diabetes runs in my family and my mother's sister was a diabetic and she died in 1971 [from] just about every complication that you read about in a book; and that really affected me. I grew up not knowing what diabetes was, so when I started nursing school, I started to study more about health issues that were related in my family and diabetes was one of them.

Are there any misconceptions the public may have about diabetes?

One of the biggest myths is that people think it's con-

tagious, which it's not.

Is there a leading cause of diabetes?

What really causes diabetes is unknown. However, with the number of people that have diabetes, the majority of it is genetics. Somewhere in the family tree, someone had the predisposition to develop diabetes.

What are some of the early symptoms of diabetes?

Some of the early symptoms can go unnoticed for years cause generally a person has had the symptoms for 10 or 12 years before they're actually diagnosed. Because the symptoms are so-unnoticeable, they mimic some other things that they have, [such as] general tiredness and frequent urination.

—Sean d'Oliveira