

## **I Will Survive**

*A New Orleans area woman uncovers new tools to fight diabetes*

**By: Brandon Campo**

**Communications Coordinator**

“I watched my husband and my mother die in part because of diabetes. I’m not going to let that happen to me,” said Jane Jones\*, a Jefferson Parish resident with diabetes.

Diagnosed with diabetes in 1990, Jones is the definition of a fighter. Along with diabetes, she suffers from hypertension and has battled cancer. Three surgeries later the cancer is in remission, but the diabetes remains a daily struggle. Jones attended educational diabetes classes in the past to help her battle the disease, and when she heard about the Limb Preservation After Katrina (LiPAK) class being taught in July in her neighborhood, she eagerly signed up for that training as well.

“I have more control over my diabetes than I had over my cancer. It takes a lot of work and effort, but I’ve got a lot to live for,” she said.

One aspect of the LiPAK class that made it unique from any other diabetes education class she had attended was the support community it provided. “It was wonderful being in a room with a group of people going through the same daily struggles as I face,” she said. “In the class we were able to interact with one another, and our instructor (eQHealth Solutions Quality Improvement Specialist Jenia Mannery) took the time to listen to us. Being with a group is so encouraging because it makes you realize you’re not alone and you’re all in this together.”

### Preventing Limb Amputation

The limb amputation rate for all Louisiana Medicare beneficiaries is the highest in the nation: 1.66 per 1000. For African-American Medicare beneficiaries, the rate is even higher. In the New Orleans and Metairie Hospital Referral Regions<sup>1</sup>, the amputation rate is as high as 5.8 per 1000. It is in part due to these figures that CMS awarded a grant to eQHealth Solutions to provide diabetes education at no cost to African American Medicare Beneficiaries in Orleans and Jefferson Parishes.

A primary education emphasis in the LiPAK class is how to conduct self-foot examination and the importance of receiving a thorough foot exam from a physician regularly. Early detection of foot ulcers or loss of sensation in a diabetic patient’s foot helps prevent limb amputation

“Whenever I go in for my checkup, I ask about my circulation in my feet and the effects of the nerve damage,” Jones said. “Even though I check my feet at home regularly, I always ask my doctor to do it.”

### A1C Management

Before attending the class, Jones said she didn’t know her A1c “number”. The A1c test measures how well a patient has managed his/her daily blood sugar level for the previous two to three months. Now, Jones visits her doctor regularly and always asks for her A1c number.

“My doctor says I’ve always managed my diabetes pretty well, but I have my ups and downs. But since attending the class, my A1c has gone from almost a nine to a seven, and I know from the class that seven is really good,” she said.

Mannery, who checks in regularly with Jones, said she is impressed at the progress Jones has made.

“At the start of the class, she (Jones) wasn’t even sure of her A1c number. Now, not only does she know what her number is, she has worked to improve it to an acceptable level. She now knows the importance of the A1C and how this relates to her diabetes control,” Mannery said.

Jones admits it hasn’t been easy following all the instructions she received in the class. One of her favorite foods is fried chicken, and she often stops for fast food because of the convenience—two things she learned aren’t good for her diabetes.

“Jenia showed us a recipe that tastes just like fried chicken, but it’s much healthier for us because it’s not actually fried,” Jones said. “Now I don’t stop so much for fast-food, but when I do, I’ll order something I learned in the class that isn’t so bad for me. It’s not always easy controlling my diabetes, but I’ve seen firsthand what the disease did to my loved ones. It’s an uphill battle, but I have what it takes to climb it.”

\*not her real name

<sup>1</sup>HRR (Hospital Referral Region), source: Dartmouth Atlas Project, Louisiana Health Care Review Environmental Scan: 2008, LSU Public Policy Research Institute

This material was produced by eQHealth Solutions (formerly Louisiana Health Care Review), the Medicare Quality Improvement Organization for Louisiana, under contract with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The contents presented do not necessarily reflect CMS policy. LA9SoW6F110-2333