

From Student to Teacher

A New Orleans Resident Answers her Calling to Save Lives & Limbs

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“A few of my fellow sisters are diabetics, and some have even suffered limb amputation. Now I’m able to use my knowledge to help them, and many of them have started to attend the classes,” said Sister Mary Robinson, a member of the Sisters of the Holy Family in New Orleans.

As a community health worker, Robinson helps instruct LiPAK (Limb Preservation after Katrina) classes, a diabetes education class offered by eQHealth Solutions.

Three years ago, however, diabetes was the furthest thing from Sister Mary Robinson’s mind. This changed after a visit to her doctor.

“My doctor told me I was a borderline diabetic. It was a real eye opener; I always thought diabetes was for other people,” Sister Mary Robinson said.

Sister Mary Robinson said her trip to the doctor inspired her to help herself and others in their fight against diabetes. Little did she know, the Every Diabetic Counts (EDC) and LiPAK programs, hosted by eQHealth Solutions, were helping Medicare beneficiaries with diabetes.

At a September health fair at St. Paul Church, Sister Mary Robinson was walking from booth to booth when a friend told her about a diabetes class that was about to begin. A diabetic herself, Sister Mary Robinson’s curiosity was peaked and she attended the class. “It was purely by chance that I attended, but looking back on it now, I’m glad I did,” she said.

The class, taught by eQHealth Solutions Quality Improvement Specialist Dr. Gwendolyn Dean, was a part of the Every Diabetic Counts program. The EDC program provides disease self-management classes at no charge to African-American Medicare beneficiaries in neighborhood locations, such as the class Sister Mary Robinson attended at the church.

“I learned so much about diabetes at the class that it made me want to get involved. I spoke to Dr. Dean after the class, and she encouraged me to become a community health worker so I could help out teaching the class, and that’s exactly what I did,” Sister Mary Robinson said.

Shortly after Sister Mary Robinson became involved with teaching the classes, Orleans and Jefferson parishes were selected to participate in the LiPAK program, an extension of the EDC program. Most of the class curriculum is the same, but the LiPAK class places a special emphasis on limb preservation.

Because the classes are so conveniently located, Sister Mary Robinson said there’s no excuse for eligible participants not to attend.

Another benefit of the class, Sister Mary Robinson said, is that she has learned from others because the class encourages participants to talk about managing their diabetes. “It’s such a great class because people usually don’t want to talk about their diabetes or they don’t think it’s a big deal,” Sister Mary Robinson said. “In the class you’re surrounded by others who have the disease which makes it much easier to talk about. Even now, as an instructor, I’m learning from participants about how they deal with having diabetes.”

Sister Mary Robinson said even though she tried to pay attention to maintaining a healthy lifestyle with diabetes, she was able to gain a wealth of knowledge in the class. Teaching the classes, she said, helps her reinforce the knowledge she learned as a student.

“It’s your responsibility to take care of yourself, nobody is going to do it for you,” Sister Mary Robinson said. “Diabetes is a controllable disease if you manage it correctly. Empower yourself; even with diabetes you still have the opportunity to live a healthy life.”

*Not real name

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