**Who is a Diabetes Specialist Nurse?**

The foundation of Nurses in Diabetes published criteria for the title

**The foundation of Nurses in Diabetes has drawn up criteria for the use of the title diabetes specialist nurse.In the criteria, the focus is on education, work experience and the content of the work itself. Using the title requires constant training and keeping up ones professional skills.**

In the minutes of the state committee of sugar disease from the year 1976, there was for the first time introduced a specialist nurse that would be appointed in hospitals. The only task of this specialist nurse was education in diabetes. In the 1980s, there were nurses and public health nurses appointed to hospitals and health care centres. Their duties were, among other things, the diabetic patient education. These nurses soon started to be called diabetesspecialist nurses.

**An unusual title**

The foundation of Nurses in Diabetes (Diabeteshoitajat ry)has, in the collaboration offor example the Finnish Nurse Association and the Diabetes Association, examined how to make the title official.The path of a nurse in becoming “a diabetes nurse” has been outlined inthe project “*The key position of a diabetes nurse”* (the research and conclusion report during 1998-2000) and in the pre-report of the enhancement of the diabetes nursing competence in the health care education and the education of diabetes specialist nurse(Dehko-reports from 2003 and 2006).

In 2009, the Finnish Nurse Association begun to grant a clinical specialist competence in nursing based on applications. The applicant needs to fulfill criteria in educational competence (40 study credits), practical skills (40 study credits) and competence in the field of co-operation and development (60 study credits).

In addition to these study credits, the applicant needs to collect 60 study credits from an individual combination of the areas of expertisementioned above. This means that the total required amount of study credits is 200.

In so far, six nurses have been granted a special competence in clinical nursing, based on nursing experience with long-term health changes and expertise in diabetic nursing.

Applying requires the membership of the Finnish Nurse Association, so there are many public health nurses and midwives who cannot apply for the special competence. In addition, the requirements are at such a high level, that the problem with the title diabetic specialist nurse remains unsolved.

**New criteria well received**

The administration of the foundation of Nurses in Diabetes decided to create the criteria for the title diabetes specialist nurse to prevent just anybody claiming to be one.

Another and more important reason for drawing up the criteria is that it is important that professionality and work quality is preserved in our trade. Diabetic nursing requires constant training and upkeep of professional skills, and the employer must make it possible. Not everybody can be called a diabetes specialistnurse. It is important to acknowledge the fact that not everyone working with diabetic nursing necessarily needs to be adiabetes specialist nurse, either. We need a lot of basic knowledge of diabetes in nursing, since no-one in nursing can avoid taking care of diabetic patients. There are many diabetics, and they get ill as the rest of us.

The criteria drawn up by the foundation of Nurses in Diabetes was introduced in a seminar in Tampere, Finland in April 2012 and it was well received. The criteria emphasize the meaning of education, work experience and work content.

**The criteria for the title diabetes specialist nurse**

*Basic education*

The diabetes specialist nurse needs to have a degree on nursing, public health nursing or midwifery. In addition to the basic degree, one needs to complete some post-graduate studies on diabetic nursing. There are many alternatives for post-graduate studies, for example a 10-30 study credit course on diabetic nursing that you can take in a university of applied sciences, or an international ENDCUP-education organized by FEND

(*Federation of European Nurses in Diabetes*).

The Diabetes Association organizes multiform learning on the development of diabetesand nursing (10 study credits), as well as basic and advanced-level courses on diabetic nursing.

In addition, it organizes special courses for nurses who work in pediatric nursing.

*Further vocational training*

A diabetes specialist nurse needs to take care of his/her further vocational training. There is plenty of training on diabetic nursing being organized. We have the yearly national training days for diabetes specialist nurses and a national diabetes day. DESG (*Diabetes Education Study Group*) organizes an annual training day. In addition, there are other more occasional national trainings and even local training days available.

Pharmaceutical businesses, partners and communities organize quality schooling and one should not forget international conferences, either. FEND, for example, organizes a conference for nurses each year.

To be a diabetes specialist nurse, one should complete at least two of the above mentionedfurther training and a national training at least in three years’ interval.

*Work experience*

If a diabetes specialist nurse uses between 76-100 percent of his/her working hours with diabetic nursing, he/she should have at least one year of work experience. If a diabetes specialist nurse uses between 51-75 percent of working hours with diabetic nursing, he/she should have at least two years of work experience, and three years if the working hours are between 30-50 percent. To fulfill these criteria, one should do diabetic nursing at least 11,5 hours per week. If these hours are not met, the expertise in diabetic nursing cannot be maintained.

*Content of the work*

When considering the content of the work, there are bound to be some major differences between nurses working in different posts. The work of a diabetes specialist nurse is the treatment and follow-up of a diabetic patient, support, guidance and consulting, as well as prevention of additional ailments. The nurse works in a close co-operation with the patient. The guidance can be either individual or group counseling.

In addition, the duties of a diabetes specialist nurse are to work for preventing diabetes, the screening of groups at risk, and if necessary, the follow-up of these groups. The diabetes specialist nurse also works in hospitals and health care centers as a consultant, and tutors and trains health care professionals.

In addition to health care professionals, the diabetes specialist nurse often trains different interest groups and networks, as well. This is emphasized when the patient is a child. In addition to the child’s parents, there are often grandparents, teachers, daycare personnel and possibly even the child’s trainer as recipients of the counselling.

The diabetes specialist nurse organizes various kinds of adaptation training and rehabilitation, and selects, plans and creates guidance material for different counselling situations. At its best, diabetic nursing can be multi-professional groupwork, where the diabetes specialist nurse works as an expert of diabetic nursing.

Diabetes is a well-used research topic in Finland, both from the medical and nursing science point of view. Diabetes specialist nurses often participate as research nurses in different study projects and experiments. There is also a delightful increase of nurses as researchers. The development of nursing done by nurses has made headway. This has led toan increased number of articles written by diabetes specialist nurses in magazines and text books of the trade, which creates visibility for the job title.

Diabetes specialist nurses do a lot of collaboration with schools. They give lectures in schools and tutor students in their work practise. They often guide the practical parts of a student’s thesis alongside with the student’s teacher.

Because of the increasing number of diabetics, the work of a diabetes specialist nurse constitutes more and more of social influence. The diabetes specialist nurse works in collaboration with the Diabetes Associationand its local branches, and takes part in several escapades as experts in their own field. The work of a diabetes specialist nurse can vary a lot in different work places. This was taken into consideration when drawing up the criteria. The conclusion was that at least five of the points in the content of the work mentioned previously need to be fulfilled on a monthly basis.

**Using the criteria ensures quality**

The foundation of Nurses in Diabetes hopes, that the criteria helps diabetes specialist nurses, other nurses working with diabetics, as well as the employers in their daily work. It can be useful for example in considering and justifying training needs and in determining how demanding the work of a diabetes specialist nurse is. We hope, that the criteria can also be used as a tool for quality insurance.

Table The criteria for the title diabetes specialist nurse

**Basic education**

vocational degree of a nurse, health care nurse or midwife

post-graduate studies: diabetic nursing 10–30 study credits (polytechnic level),

ENDCUP-trainings,occupational courses organized by the Diabetes Association

**Further training**

several course options: at least two courses a year, and a national course every three years

**Working experience**

(working with diabetes at least 11,5 hours per week)

at least a year, if 76–100% of the working hours is diabetic nursing

at least 2 years if 51–75% of the working hours is diabetic nursing

at least 3 years if, 30–50% of the working hours is diabetic nursing

**Content of the work**

(at least five of the below mentioned points need to be fulfilled on a monthly basis)

care and follow-up of diabetic patients

support and guidanceof diabetic patients and the prevention of additional illnesses

prevention of diabetes, screening of the risk groups and, if necessary, the follow-up of risk groups

working as a nurse consultant, the training and guidance of health care professionals

training and guidance of interest groups, for example the parents, grandparents, school and day care personnel

the tasks of a researcher or a research nurse, the developmental tasks of nursing

collaboration with learning institutions: for example lectures, student counselling

influencing the society

collaboration with the Diabetes Association and its local branches