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First Lady Yolanda Bryan Shares Her Personal Journey with Diabetes and Advocates for Awareness

Overcoming Challenges and Promoting Education During National Diabetes Month

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First Lady Yolanda Bryan

Over Fourteen years ago my life changed forever. The lab results were in, the doctor entered the hospital room and said the dreaded words that I will never forget, “she has Diabetes Type 1” (DT1). The doctor spoke about next steps forward of managing the chronic disease in terminology that can only be described as sounding like Charlie Brown’s teacher talking. Anyone that remembers Charlie Brown’s teacher speak it sounded exactly like: “Bwa ba bwa bwa bwa.”

I recall it crushing to hear, but even worse, looking into my daughter's fearful eyes. I was determined that she would live as normally as possible, and she did just that! She danced ballet, received her diving certification, played club and was on her school's varsity volleyball team, she even represented the USVI on the Junior National Volleyball and Basketball Teams and excelled in school. Today, despite episodes of neuropathy, she is a thriving twenty-six-year-old woman who continues to make me proud every single day!

As a mother with a child living with DT1, I know all too well the psychological upheaval that takes place in a household when faced with the many challenges of this chronic disease. Stress in the areas of social, medical resource availability, emotional and financial strain among many others take effect when the unpredictable symptoms of this diabetes strike. Not to mention the psychological distress and compounding stronghold that diabetes has on children afflicted by this illness. Whether you live with DT-1 or DT-2, it is important to have open conversations and raise awareness about diabetes.

Living with diabetes does not have to be a death sentence, however, it can be challenging, both physically and mentally, but know that you are not alone in this fight. Seek out support from local medical providers, online support groups, and counseling for individuals and families. It is also important learn how to incorporate nutritional food, the glycemic index for learning how to control sugar spikes, in addition to healthy plate portion control practices and regular exercise routines---and of course monitor your glucose levels regularly. As the holidays are upon us, let us be reminded to be mindful of portion control and the quantity of carbohydrates that we consume. I know the Thanksgiving feast looks delicious; however, you may want to choose between seasoned rice and stuffing.

During National Diabetes Month we remind ourselves that education is key when it comes to addressing diabetes. Let us break down barriers and foster empathy as we discuss one of the most prevalent health conditions worldwide - diabetes. As a caretaker, I share my personal journey with diabetes with the hope that it will be of some encouragement to those in our community who it may inspire to take action. Together with awareness, education, and all our resources both nationally and locally we will win this battle. Until a cure is found.

For more information on diabetes support services visit:

- VI Diabetes Center of Excellence - www.vidcoe.org
- Virgin Islands Department of Health - www.doh.vi.gov/diabetes
- American Diabetes Association - <https://diabetes.org/tools-resources>
- Association of Diabetes Care and Education Specialist
- www.diabeteseducator.org/living-with-diabetes
- Island Therapy Solutions - <https://islandtherapysolutions.com>

Submitted by First Lady Yolanda Bryan on Tues. Nov. 14, 2023.