





Care, education, protection – the *Associação Protectora dos Diabéticos de Portugal* goes from strength to strength

João Manuel Valente Nabais

The Portuguese Diabetes Association is the world's oldest diabetes association and a senior Member Association of the International Diabetes Federation. From the moment it was founded, early in the 20th century, to the present day, the *Associação* has been driven by a single overarching objective: to improve the quality of life of people with diabetes. Involved nationally in diabetes advocacy and the provision of education, as well as the delivery of care, APDP has become a key player in the healthcare arena in Portugal and its activities reach many thousands of people with diabetes.

Founded in Lisbon in 1926 by Dr Ernesto Roma, the Portuguese Diabetes Association (APDP) initially was called the Portuguese Association for the Protection of Poor People with Diabetes. Dr Roma was an innovator in the true sense of the word: he developed from scratch a structure that made economic and social support available to needy people and provided education to manage diabetes.

Building for a brighter future

Roma had travelled to Boston, USA, in 1922, where he visited the Joslin Clinic and witnessed the first ‘miracles’ of insulin therapy. On his return to Portugal, Roma was outraged by what he saw as the scandalous loss of life among poor people with diabetes, who received no state assistance and could not afford to buy life-saving insulin. He gathered a group of wealthy associates and people with diabetes and on 13 May 1926 founded an organization that would provide essential support to people with diabetes throughout that century and into the next.

People at the centre of care

Roma understood from the outset that it is only the person with diabetes who, with adequate and appropriate instruction and access to medication, can ensure correct treatment and control of the condition. To achieve this, people needed to develop specific skills, often those only commonly available in healthcare professionals. APDP published its first ‘bulletin’ on diabetes in 1931, in which the complexities of diabetes care were explored and the value of therapeutic diabetes education highlighted. The multidisciplinary team-based approach, with an informed person with diabetes at the heart of care, remains the cornerstone of ADPD’s clinical philosophy.

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Over the decades, APDP evolved into a modern, countrywide institution and an

international reference as a specialized diabetes healthcare provider. Its members now include people with diabetes and their families; healthcare professionals of many disciplines and others interested in improving outcomes for people with diabetes. In 1985, the President of the Republic of Portugal decorated APDP as Honorary Member of the Order of Merit for distinguished charitable services to the community. The Association was recognized in 2009 as the world’s first International Diabetes Federation Centre of Education.

Action on many fronts

Today, APDP’s activities are rolled out in four key areas: advocacy, clinical care, research and training.

Tackling social issues

In partnership with other diabetes organizations and national bodies, including the Portuguese Society of Diabetology and Endocrinology and the Union of Private Institutions for Social Solidarity, the Associação is a proactive advocate for the rights of people living with diabetes in Portugal. Represented on IDF’s Board (and currently providing the President-Elect of IDF-Europe) and the Executive Committee of the Diabetes Education Study Group, APDP is a committed force for health justice on the international stage. The Association also maintains strong links with the leading European diabetes organizations.

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A prolific publisher of books, magazines and other printed and online material, APDP collaborates with the Ministry of





Health in the definition of national health policies. The Association had an important role in the drafting of the Portuguese National Diabetes Programme and is closely involved in its implementation.

APDP has been providing diabetes training for healthcare professionals and people affected by diabetes since 1974.

Providing clinical care

More than 40,000 people nationwide benefit from integrated and specialized healthcare services provided by APDP in a range of diabetes-related fields – diabetology, paediatrics, nutrition, ophthalmology, cardiology, podiatry, nephrology, urology, women's health, mental health. Working under the auspices of a Ministry of Health protocol on healthcare for people with diabetes (and training for healthcare professionals), the Association's clinical services are integrated into the hospitals and local healthcare centres.

Supporting science

APDP promotes the development of scientific studies in epidemiology and diabetology. Moreover, it carries out

relevant scientific work in collaboration with external institutions of reference, such as the Gulbenkian Science Institute, and the University of Medical Science in Lisbon. APDP participated in international diabetology network studies like EURODIAB and DIRECT. It is active in the Euradia, SWEET and IMAGE projects and recently funded the Education and Research Centre (APDP-ERC).

Education for all

APDP's education and training activities cover the range of players involved in diabetes. Healthcare professional training (for physicians, nurses, dieticians, nutritionists, psychologists) is undertaken in the form of courses, meetings and seminars; therapeutic education in chronic diseases has been developed by APDP and is offered throughout the country. University students and professors, as well as people with diabetes and their family members, receive diabetes education at APDP's centre in Lisbon. In 2012, the *Associação* will initiate a Postgraduate Course in Diabetes for Healthcare Professionals.

The official recognition of training dates back to 1974, when the Government requested input from the *Associação* to improve the diabetes skills and knowl-

edge of healthcare professionals and people with diabetes. The Department of Training at APDP's School of Diabetes held training courses in 2011 for more than 600 healthcare professionals and some 1200 people affected by diabetes.

Holiday camps for people with diabetes have figured among APDP's activities since the 1950s. Currently, the Association organizes several camps and other group activities targeted at particular age groups or focusing on specific subjects, such as 'weekends away' for people using an insulin pump and 'active Saturdays' for people with type 2 diabetes.

One small step...

It is said that when Ernesto Roma received the invitation to become a member of IDF back in the 1950s, he replied in writing, saying that the APDP would be very happy to be part of this important institution but that the subscription fee was too high for such a poor Association – and that this payment would jeopardize its work. In the envelope, he enclosed one pound sterling. The subscription was accepted.

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