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Health

## A testing time for diabetics

Sheila O'Kelly

### Health awareness

More than 4,000 adults and parents of children who have diabetes visited the National Diabetes Health Awareness Exhibition in Dublin at the weekend.

Many more who felt they were at risk of developing diabetes but had not yet been to a GP with their concerns also went along to be checked out and get advice and information.

The extensive range of free health testing services were kept busy all day.

The tests assessed people for diabetes; A1c (a test which gives an accurate picture of the blood sugar levels over the past three months); glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy (eye disease); cholesterol; blood pressure; and BMI (body mass index).

The Diabetes Federation of Ireland, which organised the event, provided the diabetes screening and some 10 per cent of the 280 people they tested were referred on to their GPs for further tests.

Diabetes chairman Dr Tony O'Sullivan, who is a GP with a practice in Dublin, said the queues showed that there was a demand for easy access to these types of health test.

"When people are offered health checks free they are interested and do want to know about their health. These tests were free and simple for people to get access to," he said.

"It makes you think we need to make it easier for people to get to their GPs for those types of assessments.

"But, of course, that would require investment in machinery and practice nurses," he said.

Almost 200 people queued for the A1c tests, which give an accurate picture of the long-term blood glucose levels in someone who has diabetes. Previously people were advised to keep their levels under 7 but the International Diabetes Federation recently revised this figure down to 6.5.

Tony Brennan, nurse manager for Sanofi Aventis, said that Sunday's A1c results ranged from 5 to 12.9 with an

average of 7.8. This means that people are still struggling to get their blood sugars down to the optimum level.

Keeping A1c at the recommended level helps people with diabetes to avoid long-term complications like stroke, heart disease, blindness, kidney failure and amputation.

Four nurses at the Pfizer Healthcare stand tested 100 people for cholesterol and blood pressure and 50 per cent of those tested had levels that raised concern. They were given a copy of their results to bring to their GPs.

Fight For Sight tested 150 people for glaucoma and about 10 were referred on. Some 40 people were tested for diabetic retinopathy (a form of eye disease contracted by some people who have diabetes) and their tests will be assessed by a specialist.

Barry Rogers, the co-ordinator for Fight for Sight, said that young people in particular who had diabetes were very concerned about their sight.

World Diabetes Day is next Monday November 14th and the awareness exhibition was one of the related activities organised by the Diabetes Federation of Ireland to raise awareness about diabetes.

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