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Social disparities in diabetes care – a Danish cross-sectional study

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Objective: The objective of this study was to describe how socio-demographic factors are associated with the achievement of goals for diabetes care and pharmacotherapy in patients with Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus (T2DM).

Design. Cross sectional study.

Setting: A general population study in Denmark, Naestved municipality.

Subjects. A total of 907 patients with known T2DM.

Main outcome measures: Number of patients not achieving goals for diabetes care on: HbA1c- and LDL-cholesterol, Blood Pressure (BP) and lifestyle measures.

Secondary outcome: Treatment with antidiabetic, antihypertensive, and anticholesterol medication.

We investigated the association with socio-demographic factors: age, gender, income, level of education, civil status, employment, and cardiovascular disease (CVD).

Results: Poor diabetes control was associated with middle-age, low income and low level of education. The sub-group with T2DM and CVD attained treatment goals similar to the total patient sample. Men achieved goals for LDL-cholesterol and physical activity to a higher degree than - women, but were less well regulated on HbA1c. Only a minority of the patients with Type 2 DM were well regulated and reported a lifestyle according to international recommendations. Low socioeconomic status (SES) was not associated with lower levels of pharmacological treatment, rather the contrary.

Conclusion: The socio-demographic gradient in achievement of treatment goals for diabetes care is eminent even in a country with universal health coverage and reimbursement of medical expenses, especially for lifestyle measures. Low SES was associated with same or more extensive utilization of antihypertensive, anticholesterol and antidiabetic medication.

Keywords: Type 2 diabetes mellitus, Health care, Socio-economic status, lifestyle change