

Deborah Ann Healy
5370 Princeton Road
Macungie, PA 18062
610-966-2410 (home)

May 17, 2016

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to you about the essential qualifications of a Certified Diabetes Educator (CDE). My son, Michael, was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes on March 17, 2014. He was 17 years old and in his junior year of high school at the time of his diagnosis.

Michael was in a state of Diabetic Ketoacidosis when he was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes. He had a blood glucose level of 1400. It is a miracle that he lived! I thank God for this. There is not one day that goes by that I do not appreciate how truly blessed I am to have my son when I came so close to losing him.

When I look back on the time of Michael's diagnosis, I immediately remember the woman who got me through this extremely scary and stressful experience. That woman is Mary J. Cipolle. She is a Certified Diabetes Educator. Mary works at Lehigh Valley Health Network (LVHN) in Allentown. She studied nursing at the University of Illinois in Chicago.

You may be wondering why I think so highly of Mary Cipolle. Well, you must realize that my son, Michael, was admitted to the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit of Lehigh Valley Hospital when he was initially diagnosed with type 1 diabetes. Because he was in a severe state of Diabetic Ketoacidosis, he was in the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit for several days. Then, when his condition was downgraded, he was transferred to the Pediatric Care Unit for 1.5 days.

Mary Cipolle instructed us during Michael's stay in the hospital. She explained everything that we needed to know about Michael's care. Mary showed us how to check Michael's blood glucose level using a glucometer. She also educated us about the 2 types of insulin Michael would need to use. Further, she showed us how to administer insulin. We learned about ketone strips and Glucagon.

At times, I was absolutely overwhelmed. Mary always knew when to instruct and when to let me be. I needed time to process all that was happening. Truthfully, it seemed like someone new was coming into Michael's hospital room all day long. For example, there was the LVHN social worker who came in at least once to instruct us on how to apply for supplemental health insurance. Then, there was the registered dietician who visited us to explain how to calculate Michael's carbohydrates. Additionally, there were multiple friends and family members visiting us at the hospital throughout the day. This was truly overwhelming for me.

Mary sensed that I was overwhelmed. She looked at me one day and said, "You are in shock." She was absolutely right. I was in shock. However, I was able to function because my son NEEDED me to function. I had to be strong for him.

I can honestly say that Mary Cipolle knew exactly how to help me. She instructed me very effectively, and she was sensitive to my needs as a mother when I felt like I was at my breaking point.

Mary also scheduled our first appointment with the Certified Diabetes Educator and the social worker at the LVHN Pediatric Endocrinology Practice. This is where Michael goes every 3 months to have his A1C level checked.

This appointment was very important. We went to this appointment 5 days after Michael's discharge from Lehigh Valley Hospital. It was at this first appointment that we could discuss how things were going as our entire family adjusted to our "new normal" of having a child (who had in the past been very healthy) but now had a chronic illness that requires attention each and every day.

Mary also arranged to have all the medication and medical supplies available for us at the LVHN pharmacy to be picked up just an hour or two before we left the hospital. She went over all of Michael's supplies with us right before he was discharged just to make sure that we had everything that we needed. She answered all our questions about these supplies. With that strong foundation, we were then ready to leave the hospital and take care of Michael.

However, truthfully, Michael really learned very quickly how to take care of himself due to the excellent instruction that he received from Mary. I was amazed at Michael's ability to remember all that he had been taught in the hospital. That speaks volumes about both Mary (as an educator) and Michael (as a patient and a learner.)

Now, I hope that you realize from my story just how important a Certified Diabetes Educator is to a family. I honestly could not have survived that whole experience of learning about the MANY challenges associated with type 1 diabetes management without Mary Cipolle.

Please make sure that all Certified Diabetes Educators take an exam (to test their competency) before they are allowed to take on this role. The role of a Diabetes Educator is so important that it requires specialized knowledge and should require a license. I believe that not all healthcare professionals are equipped to do this job. Only those who are truly qualified should earn the right to perform this very challenging job in Pennsylvania.

Sincerely yours,

Deborah Ann Healy, M.Ed.