

Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus Patients' Quality of Life and Access to Primary Health Services in Mountainous Greece

Ahlqvist Herman*

Department of Molecular Medicine, Sapienza University of Rome, Rome, Italy

Introduction

Type 2 diabetes mellitus (T2DM) is a chronic metabolic disorder that poses significant challenges to patients' quality of life (QoL), particularly in rural and mountainous regions where access to healthcare services is limited. In Greece, the geographical and infrastructural barriers of mountainous areas exacerbate these challenges, creating a unique set of circumstances for T2DM management. This essay explores the impact of T2DM on patients' QoL in mountainous Greece, with a focus on access to primary health services, the role of healthcare infrastructure, and potential strategies for improving outcomes. Living with T2DM affects multiple dimensions of a patient's QoL, including physical, psychological, and social well-being. Physically, the disease's complications—such as neuropathy, retinopathy, and cardiovascular issues—impose limitations on mobility and daily activities. Patients in mountainous regions face additional challenges due to the physical demands of their environment, such as steep terrains and harsh weather conditions, which can exacerbate mobility issues and reduce adherence to physical activity recommendations.

Description

Psychologically, the constant need for disease management—including blood sugar monitoring, medication adherence, and dietary restrictions—can lead to stress, anxiety, and feelings of isolation. These issues are often magnified in rural and mountainous areas, where social support networks may be less robust, and mental health services are scarce. The stigma associated with chronic illness in small, close-knit communities further compounds these challenges, making it difficult for patients to seek help. Socially, T2DM can limit patients' ability to participate in community activities or maintain employment, particularly in physically demanding jobs common in mountainous regions, such as farming or forestry. Access to primary health services is a critical determinant of T2DM management and QoL. In mountainous Greece, however, geographical and infrastructural barriers often impede access to care. Many villages are located far from healthcare facilities, requiring patients to travel long distances on winding, poorly maintained roads. During winter months, snow and ice can make these journeys even more difficult, delaying or preventing access to essential medical care. Healthcare infrastructure in these regions is frequently under-resourced. Small clinics often lack the specialized equipment and trained personnel needed for comprehensive diabetes management, such as HbA1c testing, retinal screening, and foot care. Patients may need to travel to larger towns or cities for these services, which is both time-consuming and costly. For elderly patients or those with advanced complications, these logistical challenges can be insurmountable. The shortage of healthcare professionals in rural and mountainous areas further exacerbates the problem. Many primary care clinics are staffed by a single doctor or nurse who must attend to a wide range of medical issues,

**Address for Correspondence:* Ahlqvist Herman, Department of Molecular Medicine, Sapienza University of Rome, Rome, Italy, E-mail: ahlqvistherman09@edu.it

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leaving little time for the proactive management of chronic diseases like T2DM. This can result in delayed diagnoses, suboptimal treatment plans inadequate patient education about diabetes self-management. Financial strain due to medical expenses and loss of income can further reduce QoL, creating a cycle of hardship that is difficult to break [1,2].

For example, village councils can organize events promoting physical activity, such as hiking or traditional dance classes, which are both culturally relevant and beneficial for diabetes management. Religious institutions and cultural associations can also play a role in destigmatizing chronic illnesses and encouraging supportive attitudes toward patients. CHWs, who are often members of the local community, can provide education, support, and basic care to patients. Their presence can help address the shortage of healthcare professionals and foster trust between patients and the healthcare system.

Conclusion

The QoL of T2DM patients in mountainous Greece is profoundly influenced by the interplay of geographical, infrastructural, and social factors. Limited access to primary health services exacerbates the challenges of managing a complex chronic disease, leading to poorer outcomes and reduced QoL. However, targeted interventions—including telemedicine, mobile health units, community engagement, and policy reforms—offer a pathway to overcoming these barriers. By prioritizing the needs of patients in remote areas, healthcare systems can ensure that the benefits of modern diabetes care are accessible to all, regardless of location. In doing so, we can not only improve the lives of individuals living with T2DM but also strengthen the resilience and well-being of mountainous communities as a whole. The integration of innovative technologies, local resources, and comprehensive policy strategies will be key to achieving these goals and fostering equity in healthcare delivery.

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