

Boren backs OU research on diabetes

By Susan Simpson
Staff Writer

The big man on the University of Oklahoma campus is a lot smaller these days, and he has an important message to Oklahomans at risk of diabetes.

"My message is wake up, get tested and take it seriously," said OU President David Boren.

Boren has lost more than 50 pounds in recent months in an effort to control his Type II diabetes, which he said he ignored for years leading to a serious medical crisis.

In early August, he had a rare diabetic reaction to an injection aimed at relieving back pain from herniated discs and degenerated vertebrae. He was rushed from a vacation in New Mexico to OU Medical Center, where he was hooked

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Diabetes

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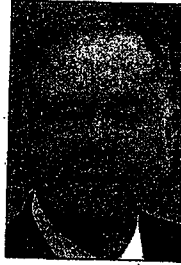
to an insulin IV.

Boren recovered from the attack and went on to have successful back surgery.

But he used the six-week recovery to make changes for a healthy lifestyle: eating right, moderate exercise and close monitoring of his blood sugar.

Boren gave up fried foods and sweets for a balanced diet low in starches and sugar. Still recovering, he walks daily and has begun exercising on a stationary bike.

He plans to lose another 12 pounds and hopes his improved health means he someday can forgo his daily diabetic medication.



OU President David Boren

He wants to help Oklahomans with diabetes.

"The doctors say I'll live 10 years longer than I would have otherwise," Boren said. "I feel like I was granted an early warning."

The close call has led Boren to increase awareness about efforts to make Oklahoma a leading national center for diabetes research and treatment.

Research and treatment

Boren has talked to Gov. Brad Henry and hopes to meet with city and tribal leaders about coordinating the university's research, education and clinical care programs into an Oklahoma Diabetes Center.

Boren said about \$50 million would build and staff a center where patients from across Oklahoma could get treatment and information, and researchers could conduct clinical tests and apply their findings.

Additional clinics could open in Tulsa — where Boren said seed money already has been pledged — and elsewhere in the state.

Oklahoma has one of the nation's highest diabetes rates, in part because of the high numbers of American Indians in its population.

More than 200,000 adults in Oklahoma have diabetes, including about 22,600 American Indians — about 11 percent of the total, according to the state Health Department. Another 100,000 may be undiagnosed.

"It's an epidemic, partly because of lifestyle issues but also because of our vulnerable populations," said Dr. Timothy Lyons, a diabetes expert who joined OU's College of Medicine in 1992.

He said diabetes costs Oklahomans nearly \$2 billion a year in medical expenses.

Since Lyons joined the university, OU Health Sciences Center has been awarded 25 diabetes-related grants worth about \$50 million. His research staff has grown from 12 to 60 people.

Federal aid considered

U.S. Rep. Dan Boren, the OU president's son, said he's seeking federal funding to boost diabetes prevention and treatment in Oklahoma.

Dan Boren said his district in Eastern Oklahoma is plagued by diabetes among Indians.

"If you are a Native American in Oklahoma you are (up to) three times more likely to get diabetes," he said.

DID YOU KNOW ?

What is diabetes?

Type 1 diabetes is usually diagnosed in children and young adults.

Type 2 diabetes is usually diagnosed in middle-aged and older people.

Diabetes is a chronic disease that causes high blood sugar levels. It can lead to serious complications, such as heart disease, kidney failure, blindness, and amputation.

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