This study explored the impact of an intensive educational intervention to patients on their knowledge and understanding of diabetes. The education of both the health care professional and the patient is a major element in the successful management of diabetes.2,5

INTRODUCTION

Approximately 24 million Americans have diabetes.1 The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that about 1.6 million new cases of diabetes were diagnosed in people aged ≥20 years in 2007.1 The burden of diabetes is very high; it is one of the leading causes of death and disability in the United States, including blindness, end-stage kidney disease, and lower limb amputations,1 and is an independent risk factor for heart disease and stroke. In the absence of a cure for diabetes, the key to good health is control, keeping blood sugar levels along with blood pressure and cholesterol, as close to normal as possible. Good control in the long run may reduce diabetes complications that include damage to blood vessels, eyes, kidneys, and nerves.1 Most notably, good control of blood sugar levels is largely contingent on proper diet, exercise and physical activity, adherence to medication regimens and regular monitoring.1 In spite of the high prevalence of diabetes, public awareness of the disease is consistently very low, particularly among at-risk minority populations such as African Americans and Hispanics, even as those populations have the highest prevalence and rate of complications. Lack of awareness together with poor knowledge of diabetes presents a missed opportunity to empower the patients thus precluding an active role for the patient in his/her own diet, physical activity and adherence to medical regimen and clinical monitoring.1–3 One of the goals of Healthy People 2010 was to increase the number of people reached with diabetes education from 40% in 1998 to 60% by 2010.4 Proper management of diabetes is largely predicated on day-to-day decisions made by individuals, and unless those individuals have proper knowledge, they cannot make the complex daily medically-related decisions required for good health, quality of life and survival. The results of the landmark Diabetes Control and Complications Trial3 proved that intensive management of diabetes can significantly improve diabetes outcomes. Specifically, the education of both the health care professional and the patient is a major element in the successful management of diabetes.2,5

As in any educational intervention, an important question for diabetes education is whether patients are retaining knowledge. Although knowledge alone does not ensure behavior changes or effective self-management,6,7 it is a necessary first step. The evaluation of diabetes-related knowledge provides a critical template on which to build customized diabetes education programs and evaluate them.6,7 This study evaluates the knowledge of diabetes patients in the Baltimore Cardiovascular Partnership Program during a 2-year time period. We hypothesized that patient’s knowledge and understanding of diabetes increased over time with education.

METHODS

We conducted this study within the scope of the Baltimore Cardiovascular