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Air Force officer faces life with diabetes

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AIR FORCE OFFICER
FACES LIFE WITH DIABETES

By Dennis Sale
UM Information Services

MISSOULA, Mont.--

When he began his Air Force career 10 years ago at the University of Montana, little did Capt. C. Wayne Pedersen realize he would be facing the possibility of a medical discharge in 1970.

Pedersen, who may be fighting a continuing battle with the once-feared diabetes mellitus the rest of his life, can breathe a sigh of relief now, but last March it was a different story.

The Pedersen family ended the old year and started the new much the same as millions of other families, with the joy and merriment of the Christmas and New Year's Holidays. It wasn't long, however, before diabetes changed the captain's life.

"I first noticed the symptoms of diabetes about the end of February," Pedersen said. "By the 5th of March I was in the hospital at Fairchild Air Force Base, Spokane, Wash., for tests."

Pedersen and his wife, the former Barbara Kay Wood of Billings, Mont., noticed a sudden loss of weight. Pedersen dropped from 187 lbs. to 165 lbs. within two weeks.

"My near-vision failed and I was frequently hungry and thirsty," Pedersen said. "On March 3rd I had a steak and lobster dinner in Missoula and I lost 3 lbs. anyway. By then we knew for sure something was wrong."

The 33-year-old Kalispell, Mont., native visited a local physician, who diagnosed the case as diabetes mellitus, a disease typified by high sugar content in the blood and urine. In the disease, the pancreas fails to secrete enough of the hormone insulin to convert sugars and starches into energy.

Pedersen spent a total of 20 days in the hospital at Spokane during the months of February and March. At first he had to take insulin shots, and later an oral agent to bring the disease under control.

Now he is on a strict diet. He is limited to an intake of 2,600 calories per day and he must avoid alcohol and sugar altogether.

In food normally requiring sugar, Pedersen has to be satisfied with imitation sweeteners. But the guidelines for an otherwise healthy life are relatively easy for the captain to follow, especially since he knows he stands a pretty good chance of staying in the Air Force.

"I was worried about a possible medical discharge," Pedersen said, "because the Air Force normally won't keep you if you are on insulin shots. I want to stay in the Air Force at least 20 years, so you can understand how I felt when I learned I might be discharged with fewer than 10 years in."

Mrs. Pedersen also hopes her husband can continue his Air Force career.

"It's sort of an upset to have your whole world change," she said in referring to Pedersen's experience with diabetes. "But we're still hoping. Time will tell."

Pedersen said it may be several years before the symptoms of diabetes recur, if they recur at all.

"We're hoping the strict diet controls the disease permanently," Pedersen said. "I want to stay in the service very much. I like the travel and security, and the responsibility given to me is outstanding."

Pedersen, who has been an assistant professor of aerospace studies at the University of Montana, Missoula, since 1967, will become chief of budget beginning Aug. 1 at the Technical Training Center, Keesler Air Force Base, Biloxi, Miss., where the budget totals \$136 million.

During his three years at UM, the captain, who is awaiting promotion to the rank of major, was faculty adviser to Angel Flight, the women's auxiliary to the Arnold Air Society, an Air force ROTC cadet group.