

DiabetesVoice

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES ON DIABETES

Volume 60 - March 2015



**Embracing
the digital future**

Diabetes is my life partner

François Gishoma

It is difficult to say what motivates me most to fight for a healthier life with type 1 diabetes because the motivation changed over the course of my illness. What has remained constant is the support of my family and my efforts to help other people living with diabetes.

When I was diagnosed in 1995 after the terrible events that happened in Rwanda – the genocide against the Tutsi – it was very difficult to live with the conditions of diabetes. The entire country was mourning, with thousands of people killed and millions exiled. Infrastructures had been destroyed and the healthcare system was paralyzed without healthcare personnel and basic materials. While the survival of the Rwandan population was uncertain, living with diabetes during this period was almost impossible.

During my struggle to live with the limited care available at that time, I realized how lucky I was to have access to some form of treatment while many others living with diabetes under the same conditions in Rwanda could not. I decided to fight back for better care not only for myself, but also for others living with diabetes. Two years after my diagnosis, I founded a diabetes association with the purpose of improving the lives of people living with diabetes and the lives of their families. During the last 17 years, I initiated and participated in various activities related to prevention, diabetes awareness, access to diabetes medication and advocacy for the rights of people with diabetes. In order to achieve improved care and access, I received a lot of support from many partners, whom I cannot thank enough. My greatest experience



was the association with the International Diabetes Federation in 2003, which I believe was a major step in overcoming barriers in Rwanda related to national borders, and allowing Rwandans ways to contribute to the diabetes cause on a bigger scale with a louder voice. The reach of a Rwandan Diabetes Association had an expanded network.

When diabetes is associated with other life difficulties, such as poverty, lack of knowledge on diabetes care, and malnutrition, the challenges for survival increase and a person living with diabetes becomes much more vulnerable. I believe, as a patient, that what makes the difference in diabetes self-management is a person's attitude towards the disease. The attitude that saved me is the way I positively perceived my disease: I changed from seeing diabetes as my enemy to considering it my friend. Diabetes was like my life partner who stays with me no matter what, and this attitude helped me to thrive with diabetes.

Even if in the past, I made a great effort to control diabetes, I unfortunately also made mistakes and developed different complications, which have led me into a very difficult situation. Today my motivation has grown even stronger. I strive to live better because my fight is not at its end.

François Gishoma

François Gishoma, founder of the Rwanda Diabetes Association, is 66 years, married and father to six adult children. Diagnosed with type 1 diabetes in 1996, he has lived in Paris since 2012 because of diabetes complications. François received a kidney transplant in October 2014.