The Department of Transportation (DOT) Medical Examination is highly regulated as illness complications can have serious consequences for the driver, the examiner and the general public. DOT medical guidelines outline the health criteria that commercial vehicle drivers must meet to qualify for certification. One health condition that is closely reviewed by the DOT is diabetes. Individuals with known or suspected diabetes are required to provide specific medical information to the DOT-certifying physician regarding diabetic control. The DOT definition of diabetic control often causes confusion for individuals seeking certification as well as their employers. The following information provides answers to common questions and clears up misconceptions about diabetes and DOT certification.

The maximum certification for a person with diabetes is one year. According to DOT guidelines, a person with diabetes, whether controlled with diet alone or diet plus medication, must maintain a glycosylated hemoglobin (Hemoglobin A1C or “HBA1C”) of 8% or less.

The HBA1C is a measure of the average amount of sugar in the blood over the last three months. A normal HBA1C is less than 5.7%. Values between 5.7 and 6.4% are classified as being in the pre-diabetic range. These individuals should be closely monitored. If the level is above 6.4%, then the person is diabetic. The HBA1C correlates with end organ (blood vessels, nerves, kidneys, heart or eyes) damage and therefore is a common marker for disease control. Glycosylated hemoglobin can be a good estimate of the average blood sugar and is much more accurate in assessing diabetic control than a fasting blood sugar that varies from day to day. It takes about three months for HBA1C to drop, generally by one percentage point. Therefore, three consecutive fasting glucose levels of 180 mg/dl or less is also acceptable when a person shows strong efforts towards glucose control.

An HBA1C level of 5% correlates with a blood sugar level of 90 mg/dl and the value increases by 30 mg/dl for each point above 5%. Hence, a blood sugar of 180 suggests an HBA1C of 8.
The driver must not have a history of the following:

(a) One or more hypoglycemic episodes in the past 12 months, or two or more occurrences in the past five years resulting in:
   » Seizure
   » Loss of consciousness
   » Need for assistance from another person
   » Period of confusion

(b) Signs of end organ damage:
   » Retinopathy
   » Macular degeneration
   » Peripheral neuropathy
   » Congestive heart disease
   » Stroke
   » Peripheral vascular disease
   » Kidney failure

“On many occasions, BarnesCare providers are the first to tell a patient that they are diabetic,” says Leslie Arroyo Robins, DO, FAAFP, BarnesCare physician. “In a country where 25.8 million people are diabetic, seven million are undiagnosed and 79 million are pre-diabetic, we have to do everything we can to abate this crisis. Diabetes screening also provides an opportunity to promote diet and exercise programs to our workforce.”

Diabetic individuals seeking DOT certification must provide current (within six months) diabetic control information to the examining physician. This information should be available as part of routine diabetes care through the individual’s primary care physician. To avoid delays in certification, BarnesCare recommends that individuals meet with their primary care physician in advance of the examination to obtain copies of the required laboratory information, then bring that information to the DOT appointment.

Diabetics who require insulin for control cannot be approved for DOT certification unless they have a waiver. The diabetic waiver application and program details can be found on the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration website. The process for obtaining a waiver is cumbersome and only a small number of drivers have received this exemption since the waiver program was instituted in 1996.

“These medical guidelines can be quite complex,” says Scott C. Jones, DO, MPH, FAOCOPM, BarnesCare medical director. “The medical team at BarnesCare understands the DOT regulations and their importance in promoting driver health, wellness and public safety. We are always available to answer any questions or concerns you may have.”

For additional information, please call 314-747-5859.