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Train N.J.'s police to spot diabetes: Opinion

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Star-Ledger Guest Columnist

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Steve Rosen, a 48-year-old Philadelphia businessman and cancer survivor on an insulin pump for Type 1 diabetes, was arrested over a technical liquor code violation at a club he owned. During his two days in police custody, he suffered from dangerously low blood sugar, dangerously high blood sugar, was denied access to medication, food and fluids, and twice ended up in the hospital.

The silver lining of Rosen's 1999 nightmare, besides surviving with no permanent injury, was that his experience became the seed of a class action lawsuit and settlement that changed training and policies on police interaction with people with diabetes in Philadelphia and elsewhere.

As part of the settlement, the American Diabetes Association and the Philadelphia Police Department jointly produced a diabetes training video and a poster on diabetes information for police. The video plays a critical role in police academy training and has been viewed by every active Philadelphia officer. The posters, which highlight the warning signs of diabetes emergencies, hang visibly in all Philadelphia police facilities. Law enforcement agencies everywhere have incorporated these resources into their training.

So, it was with a sense of horror and rueful irony that I learned the video's director, Dan Fried, who himself has Type 1 diabetes, was arrested and suffered a broken wrist at the hands of New Jersey State Police troopers during a hypoglycemic incident in 2010.

Fried wasn't the first person suffering a hypoglycemic event to be abused by poorly trained police — the association



Andre Malok/The Star-Ledger

Daniel Fried, 46, of Springfield, Pa., ended up in a struggle with New Jersey State Police after he pulled himself over in his van in November 2010 on Route 72 in Burlington County because he had gone into diabetic shock.

Police car camera footage of Daniel Fried arrest

On Nov. 20, 2010, Daniel Fried, 46, of Springfield, Pa., was driving home from his shore house on Long Beach Island when he suffered low blood sugar and pulled over. State Police Trooper Paul Brown responded to a report of an erratic driver, found Fried's van on the side of Route 72 in Woodland Township and suspected he may be suffering from diabetes. But when a second trooper, Scott Tetzlaff, arrived, Brown did not mention his suspicion of a medical problem or the odd symptoms Fried was displaying. The video interview of Daniel Fried is [here](#).

has reports of incidents in 34 states over the past five years. Examples include Mr. Universe 2006, Doug Burns, diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes at age 7, who was pepper-sprayed, struck and arrested by Redwood City, Calif., police when he suffered severe hypoglycemia in a theater. Like Fried, Burns was wearing a medical alert bracelet.

Last year, Adam Greene, who also has Type 1 diabetes, was pulled over while suffering from hypoglycemia near Las Vegas. Unable to respond or explain, he endured rib-breaking kicks from local police.

Despite many such troubling, easily avoidable incidents between police and people suffering the effects of hypoglycemia, there is room for optimism. Philadelphia has set the bar with training and policies, which it continues to update and improve.

The New York Police Department has taken an important first step by meeting with American Diabetes Association medical experts and lawyers to start a much-needed review of its training. The Department of Homeland Security started using the Philadelphia video in its training last year. And local police in Mississippi have sought diabetes training from association volunteers.

While such department-by-department enlightenment is valuable, the testimony in Fried's civil suit — that a department with the size, resources and jurisdiction of the New Jersey State Police provides its troopers no training on diabetes — is inexcusable. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nearly 26 million Americans have diabetes. Knowing how to recognize and respond to a potentially life-threatening diabetes emergency is essential for every police officer.

The American Diabetes Association has been working to assist law enforcement agencies by providing them with information about diabetes. Fried's case brought welcome scrutiny from New Jersey legislators and garnered the attention of law enforcement groups.

This moment is also an opportunity for proven major police training and policy entities such as the Police Executive Research Forum and the International Association of Chiefs of Police to develop national standards and education guidelines on police interaction with citizens with diabetes.

In the meantime, the New Jersey State Police need to immediately get copies of Fried's training video and make sure all roopers watch it.

Alan L. Yatvin is legal advocacy chairman of the American Diabetes Association and a partner in the Philadelphia law firm of Popper & Yatvin, where he concentrates in police misconduct litigation.

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