

“You will be on insulin”: Contestation of epistemic certainty in patient accounts of GDM healthcare communication

A diagnosis of gestational diabetes (GDM) can significantly impact on the experience and anticipated course of pregnancy of the patient, from diet control as part of self-management to medical and birth interventions (Parsons et al. 2018). Such modifications to behaviour and expectations serve to mitigate risk. At the same time, they are counterfactually rooted in the prediction of adverse outcomes which cannot be known with certainty.

Patients may hence question medical guidance on self-management and interventions. On the other hand, healthcare providers (HCPs) tasked with high stakes conversations on risk and care pathways seeking to mitigate its effects may overstate probability as certainty of future events, such as adverse outcomes necessitating interventions, or the interventions themselves. Here, we examine focus group accounts of UK participants recruited through an online GDM support community, in which they contest expressions of inevitability in HCP communication—a selected subset of a wider demographic totalling more than 7 focus groups of around 90 minutes. Drawing on Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014), we identified and analysed relayed episodes in which epistemic modality of certainty was key to contestation by participants. We consider GDM healthcare implications of such communication as well as patient resistance.

References

- Halliday, M. A. K., & Matthiessen, C. M. I. M. (2014). *Halliday's Introduction to Functional Grammar*. Routledge.
- Parsons, J., Sparrow, K., Ismail, K., Hunt, K., Rogers, H., & Forbes, A. (2018). Experiences of gestational diabetes and gestational diabetes care: a focus group and interview study. *BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth*, 18(1).