Their understanding may be influenced by media reports or their own beliefs about how conditions run in families. While genetic counsellors are highly skilled at communicating information, patients spend relatively little time with them compared with, for example, community nurses. Sometimes, patients may not even be referred to genetics services. The nursing role here is to inform and support decision making about genetic testing, reproductive and lifestyle choices, and direct patients and families to further information; reflecting on practice is particularly important where new knowledge and skills are being acquired and applied to practice. Reflection helps to maintain an awareness of the limitations of knowledge, and helps nurses to be aware of the wider implications of genetic information for patients, families and society in general.

The first step in this is for nurses to build on their “basic” knowledge to learn about how genetics/genomics applies to patients or clients in their particular area of practice. Diabetes is an example of this (Box 4).

**Box 2. Impact of lack of Genetics Knowledge on Patient Care**

Tony has sickle cell disease, a recessively inherited condition caused by a mutation in the beta-haemoglobin gene that affects about one in every 300 people of African-Caribbean origin. An estimated 125,000 people in the UK have the condition. Tony recounts his experience of transitional care as a young adult admitted to acute wards during episodes of excruciatingly painful sickle cell crisis.

“When I moved over to the adult wards, I found the staff had no knowledge of it at all really, hardly any of them... I was in hospital and I just wanted to cry really. Because on the ward they put me on, the staff didn’t know anything about it. Not a bit.”

He describes one experience in relation to his inadequate pain management while on the ward and concludes: “That's one of the worst experiences I have ever had and to me the most frightening. Like I said, now I'm scared of going back into hospital.”

Source: NHS National Genetics Education and Development Centre (2009)