

EPILEPSY: AWARENESS STRATEGY

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Epilepsy is one of the most common disorders of the nervous system affecting more than 3 million Americans. More than 45,000 new cases are diagnosed annually. 1 in 100 will have a seizure in their lifetime. Epilepsy is more common than Cerebral Palsy, Multiple Sclerosis and Parkinson's disease. No reliable statistics found in our country.

The word "epilepsy" is derived from a Greek word meaning "to seize". Many notable people in history have been diagnosed with or are believed to have had some form of epilepsy including Julius Caesar, Albert Einstein, and Agatha Christie.

Epilepsy can develop at any time of life. The occurrence of new cases is more common in children and in people older than 60 years of age. The number of cases among older adults is increasing as the population ages. The effects of epilepsy also can affect the transition to adult activities (e.g., driving and working). Approximately 1% of adults have active epilepsy and many might not be receiving the best available medical care.

In most cases, the cause of epilepsy is unknown. For approximately 70% patients who are diagnosed with epilepsy the cause is either cryptogenic (of unknown use) or idiopathic (presumed to be genetic). For the remaining 30%, the causes are generally the same as those for symptomatic seizures.

Epilepsy is a group of related disorders, not a single disease. A person who has had more than one seizure that has occurred spontaneously (not the result of a temporary, treatable condition) is said to have epilepsy. A seizure is the physical manifestation of a sudden disruption of orderly communication between neurons in the brain. A seizure can take a variety of forms, depending on where the disruption occurs and how far the resulting abnormal electrical activity spreads. The type of epilepsy a person has is determined by their predominant seizure type and other related signs and symptoms. Delayed recognition of these seizures and subsequent inadequate treatment increases the risk for additional seizures, disability, decreased health related quality of life and in rare instances death.

To improve the health care and community support available to persons affected by epilepsy, there should be Epilepsy Foundation who will conduct a multiyear national campaign to use public education and programs that foster community awareness. The goal of this year's campaign entitled "No More Seizures" is to increase the number of persons with epilepsy who can achieve optimum control of their condition (i.e., no seizures or treatment side effects). To achieve this goal, basic education and empowerment messages have been developed to encourage persons with epilepsy to learn about new treatments, seek the care of specialists, trained in epilepsy care and discuss the management of their condition with their doctors. In addition, persons who have experienced seizures can access a new website (<http://www.nomoreseizures.org>).

Other campaign activities include school-based health education programs, community workshops and their caregivers. In addition, the Epilepsy Foundation should develop pilot curricula for police and emergency response personnel and is evaluating a pilot comprehensive employment program to educate employers about epilepsy in the workplace. The Epilepsy Resource Center will support consumers through online, telephone, e-mail, and regular mail services. Partnerships with other national and local organizations have been established to provide programs in public education and community awareness. There should be an emergency telephone number to call nationwide.

Bringing epilepsy awareness to the classroom can provide many valuable lessons. Acceptance of others, de-stigmatizing epilepsy and other health conditions furthering students understanding of basic and advanced functions of the brain, enrich health science and social studies lessons, optimizes ability to manage seizures and consequences, helps insure full integration of the student in school activities and minimizes stigma. School personnel should recognize seizures and its consequences, provide appropriate first aid, recognize when a seizure is a medical emergency, deliver appropriate social and academic support and understand the seizure action plan.

Essential training topics should include. What is a

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seizure? What is epilepsy? Who has epilepsy? What do seizures look like? What are common myths about epilepsy? What is appropriate first aid for seizures? When is a seizure an emergency? What causes seizures? What are common seizure triggers? What can be done to prevent stigma? What is a Seizure Action Plan? How is it best used?

Strategies for reducing stigma incorporate epilepsy education into health curricula for all students include seizure first aid, appreciate the spectrum of epilepsy hidden nature and uniqueness of individual experiences, support student involvement in extracurricular activities, look beyond the seizures assess the impact, coordinate a team approach, help the student and family understand any limitations that the doctor may put on the student. Educate all school personnel to assist with minimizing stigma (myths, first aid, support strategies), prevent bullying and teasing when possible, teach coping strategies for managing life and school, help enhance independence, address parental over-protectiveness if necessary could be a resource. Put the family in contact with the Epilepsy Foundation affiliate and any other resource that may also be helpful.

Resources

1. Seizure Training for School Personnel Toolkit
2. Brochures, videos, pamphlets, fact sheets, posters
3. Seizures and You: Take Charge of the Facts, (An Epilepsy Awareness Program for Teens)
4. Managing Students with Seizures: A Quick Reference Guide for School Nurses
5. To review the product catalogue online. Go to www.epilepsyfoundation.org and visit the Epilepsy Foundation's Marketplace
6. Materials may be ordered through the local Epilepsy Foundation affiliate sponsoring this program or by calling national emergency telephone number