

Caritas (Malta) Epilepsy Association

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5th April 2001

PRESS RELEASE

WHO Day : Mental Health: Stop Exclusion – Dare to care

Epilepsy – Out of the Shadows

On the Occasion of World Health Day dedicated to **mental health issues and brain disorders**, WHO are highlighting the key concerns of care and exclusion as demonstrated by a limited number of disorders: depressive disorders, schizophrenia, Alzheimer's disease, alcohol dependence, epilepsy and mental retardation.

The **Caritas (Malta) Epilepsy Association** wishes to use this occasion to highlight the problems persons with **Epilepsy** still face even here in Malta. **Epilepsy** is the most common neurological brain disorder, affecting over 1% of the populations with over 3000 people being affected in Malta.

Many advances have been made in research regarding the available treatment settings for intervention and to permit persons with this disorder to be functioning members of the community. Meaningful knowledge has been gained on the causation, associations, characteristics of **Epilepsy**. Yet, many countries are reluctant to effectively address the burden of existing **Epilepsy** problems through appropriate policy, legislation and services.

There is also social exclusion resulting from stigma and discrimination. Less exclusion, less discrimination will help those afflicted and their families to lead better and more productive lives. **Even here in Malta we have persons with controlled epilepsy being discriminated against in terms of employment, schooling and even in the granting of marriage licenses.**

The **Caritas (Malta) Epilepsy Association** has been set up to serve as a local chapter of the **International Bureau for Epilepsy (IBE)**. This is the association for persons with epilepsy and their families, and it aims to promote and increase local awareness, especially since there are more than 3000 people suffering from epilepsy in Malta, ameliorating services for people with epilepsy.

It also propagates the initiative of the International League Against Epilepsy (ILAE) / International Bureau Against Epilepsy (IBE) and World Health Organisation (WHO) ILAE/IBE/WHO global campaign in epilepsy entitled ***Epilepsy Out of the Shadows***. ***Out of the Shadows*** is aimed at improving health care services, treatment and social acceptance of epilepsy as a serious, yet treatable, brain disorder. Raising public and professional awareness and dispelling myths about epilepsy was one of its key elements.

"Epilepsy can be treated. Epilepsy must be treated. From a medical point of view that is so obvious," stated Hanneke de Boer, Chairperson of the Executive Board of the ILAE/IBE/WHO Global Campaign against Epilepsy and an epilepsy patient herself. ***"To promote better services and treatment of epilepsy, we need to encourage patients and their families to step out of the shadows, on the one hand and to create the conditions, in which they can seek medical help without fear of prejudice or penalty, on the other,"*** she said.

"Out of the Shadows is part and parcel of the new global strategies of the World Health Organization in coping with the hidden and ever-increasing burden of mental illness," commented from Geneva Dr Derek Yach, WHO Executive Director responsible for this area. ***"Human rights of patients, including those with epilepsy, are at the core of our new strategies and WHO's work in the field of mental and neurological disorders."***

According to WHO's "World Health Report 1997", more than 40 million people worldwide suffer from different types of epilepsy. Around 85% of these people live in developing countries. The World Bank report "Investing in Health" (1993) states that in 1990 epilepsy accounted for nearly 1% of the world's disease burden. Epilepsy commonly attacks young people in the most productive years of their lives, often leading to avoidable unemployment.

The **Caritas Malta Epilepsy Association** organises monthly meeting in order for members to share their problems and experiences in full confidentiality, and it also liaises with policy makers and health officials on the various needs and problems met by people with epilepsy. It has also published several information leaflets in Maltese and may be contacted on tel no 233933.

Yours sincerely

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